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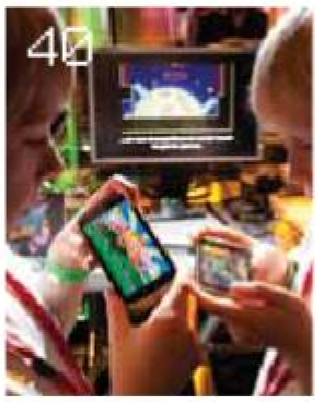

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develop
THE INTERNATIONAL MONTHLY FOR GAMES PROGRAMMERS, ARTISTS, MUSICIANS AND PRODUCERS

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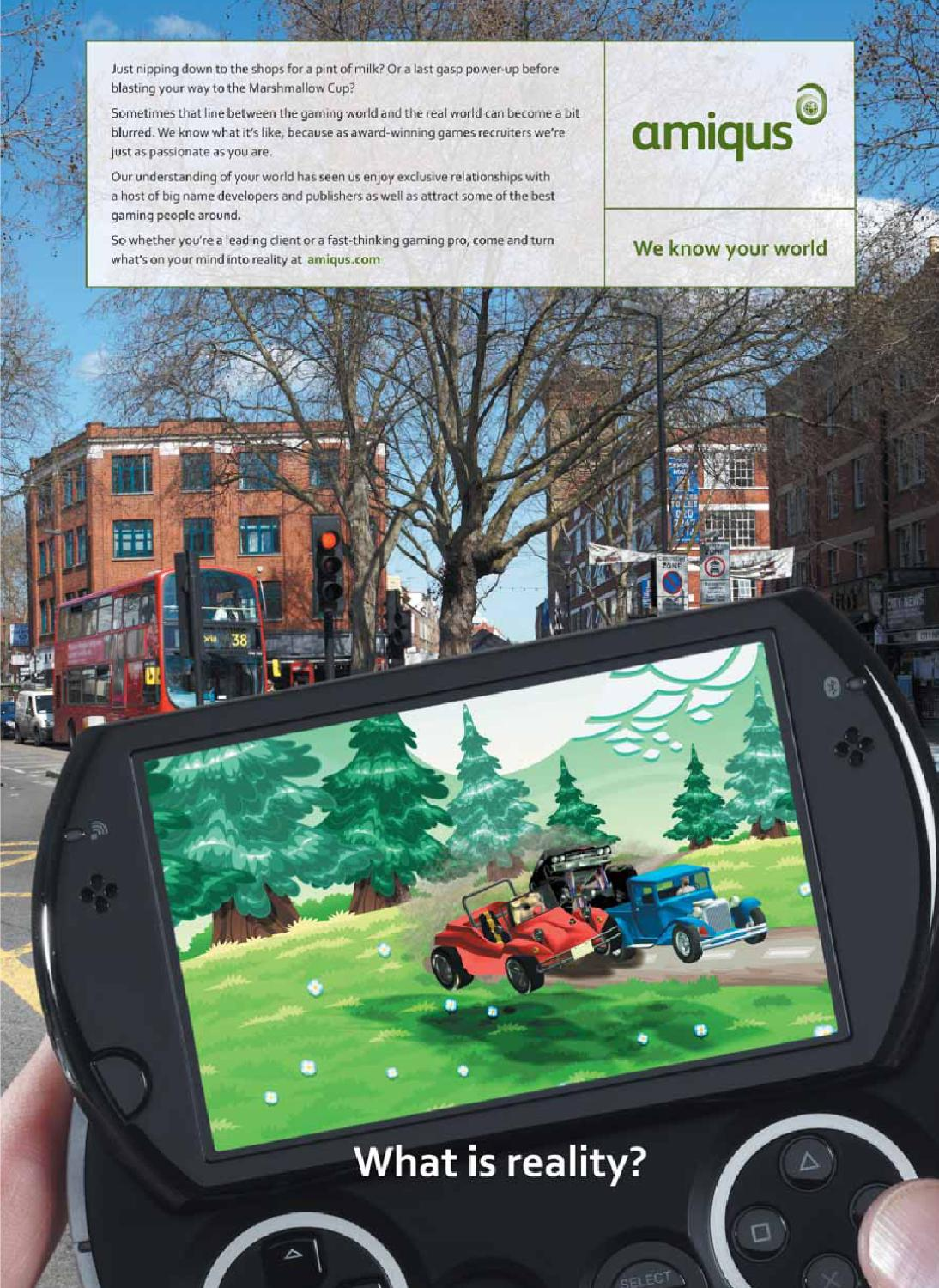

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> **"I personally prefer games to have a strong central storyline that keeps me engaged."**
> Billy Thomson, Ruffian Games, p13

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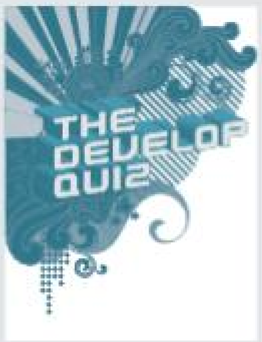

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Trade bodies' new tactics

Rebranded-ELSPA targets developers as it expands remit in UKIE revamp ● Tiga adds individual memberships

ukie
THE ASSOCIATION FOR UK INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT

by Michael French

THE ASSOCIATION formerly known as ELSPA is expanding its remit to include developers.

Now called UKIE, the organisation which helped establish the PEGI ratings has rebranded and expanded its remit to better serve the continually evolving nature of the games industry.

It unveiled the new logo at a Westminster-based event earlier this month for selected publishers, developers, media and politicians.

UKIE plans to become more appealing to developers given huge shifts in the industry which have seen a number of studios move to self-publishing, and no longer rely on the core audience of publishers that formed ELSPA's core audience.

Its launching a new website and wants to give studios a voice in its role interfacing with the government and the media when it comes to representing the industry.

"The market is no longer fitting into the demarcation of publisher, developer, retailer, distributor – we are no longer in silos, but in a more homogenous market," director general Michael Rawlinson told *Develop*.

"We are called upon more often than not to speak for the entire industry – but we can't do that. Neither trade association says that they are able to represent the whole industry because their memberships do not completely represent the games industry.

He said that in time membership of UKIE will be "companies that are in the business of making and exploiting interactive entertainment products", regardless of their label as developer or publisher.

Rawlinson added: "The games industry no longer about just a single physical point of contact – not just consoles or PCs, it's MMOs, browser and mobile as well now. It's a much bigger remit that we want to cover."

"This is no longer an exclusive club – it is welcoming and requires participation to make it what our members want it to be, so come and join us."

> ***"The market is no longer fitting demarcation - we are no longer in silos, but a more homogenous market."***
>
> Michael Rawlinson, UKIE

TIGA ON THE PROWL FOR SOLO MEMBERS

UKIE may be targeting development firms now, but Tiga has switched its membership tactics as well – it's now expanded to include individual members.

From the autumn Tiga's Individual Membership will offer those who sign up alone discounts on a range of related goods – from retail items to event tickets, software, hardware and training – as well as the chance to join regular networking events arranged for all members.

The organisation is seeking to ensure that no single developer is left out of any possible opportunity to join. It means that UK development studios that choose not to be a Tiga member could soon be staffing people who have joined the organisation separately from their new employer.

Said Tiga CEO Richard Wilson: "Individual membership will provide access to a whole range of benefits for members, focusing on three core areas – career development; material benefits; and networking opportunities."

Tiga said it is now seeking to help "both aspiring games developers and those already working in the industry to fulfil their career ambitions".

Editorial

Reality Check

THE FATHER OF *GTA* teaming up with the man who built Psygnosis and the man who produced *Donkey Kong Country* – what could possibly go wrong?

Thousands of words have already been written about the sad demise of Realtime Worlds last month.

But amongst and the accusations of hubris, corporate overspending and management over-ambition lies a human story. And it isn't pretty – lots of individuals are cruelly asking: Who is to blame for the studio's failure?

Is it Dave Jones and the exec team, as suggested by the now-spurned staff, most of which have been cut adrift without pay?

Was it those very workers, who didn't manage to convince their superiors that new game *APB* wasn't going to cut it, as many of them claim they suspected all long?

Or the media, for never asking RTW to properly explain its concept before the game landed, and thus potentially not sparking any tweaks that could have saved the game?

Perhaps the investors, who ploughed at least $105m into the studio and give it delusions of grandeur that led to buying back publishing rights for $10m, failed investments in a Korean studio and paying for a vast server operation?

EA? Allegedly it told RTW to release *APB* ASAP.

Or what about old friend Microsoft? It didn't argue back when RTW pushed the *Crackdown* franchise away, effectively handing a commercial safety net to a rival team just down the road.

The culprit is all of them. Every step along the way in the Realtime Worlds story, there were missteps and oversights that can be apportioned to any of those people, and more. (How about the rubber-necked recruiters, mindless MPs and pompous pundits who accelerated the studio's demise by dismantling its team and reputation, making it a lost cause?)

Of course, hindsight is a remarkable thing – like many studio collapses, the faults are unique to the situation. And really, I don't think anyone of those groups should be singled out.

You can't blame the RTW team for being ambitious. Back when the studio was founded in 2004, the excitement in the room understandably suggested the team were poised for greatness. *APB* and RTW were conceived to go against the ideals and ambitions of the time – go online, and go without publishers. But it it took six years to fulfil that aim. By 2010 the world had changed.

So maybe there is a lesson there for everyone: be realistic, and be quick.

Michael French

michael.french@intentmedia.co.uk

Michael

The Develop Quiz returns

Time to prove that your team is the brainiest in the industry

THE DEVELOP QUIZ
The Develop Quiz

by Will Freeman

THIS MONTH SEES the return of the Develop Quiz, which provides a chance to prove that you and your colleagues are the brainiest in the business.

Places are already selling fast at the perennial favourite on the industry events calendar.

Presently only five tables remain for the UKIE and Deep Silver sponsored event, which features a free bar, food, the quiz itself, and the chance to walk away with some fantastic prizes.

First prize is £2,000 advertising credit in *Develop* print or online, plus a bottle of champagne for each team member.

Second prize is lunch with the *Develop* editors, plus champers for every team member. And the team in third place will get a bottle of bubbly each.

15 teams are already signed up, namely Rocksteady, Firefly Studios, Peppermint PR, HotGen, Splash Damage, Blitz Game Studios, Spov, UKIE, Wonderland Software, Aardvark Swift, Deep Silver, Big Head Games, Premier Pr, Lunch PR and Centroid. Big Head Games is also a round sponsor of the event.

> ***The Develop Quiz provides a chance to for you to prove that you and your colleagues are the brainiest in the sector.***

For just £199 to enter a team of five, the Develop Quiz offers not only the opportunity of showing up your peers and rivals, but a chance to attend a fantastic networking gathering and a way to let your hair down as a team, in a relaxed, social environment.

The Develop Quiz takes place on September 29th at the popular Sway Bar, in central London's Holborn, and will see 20 teams of five compete for the prizes and prestige.

If you'd like to take part in Develop's increasingly popular battle of the brains, simply contact *Kathryn.Humphrey@intentmedia.co.uk to book your place.*

Sponsorship opportunities are also available.

For more information contact Katie.Rawlings@intentmedia.co.uk.

Develop heads to Liverpool as Evolve debuts in London

Excitement builds for the leading European conference and expo for games developers and its emerging technology focused sister-event

8 December 2010
evolve
in London
UNDERGROUND
SANYO
TDK

THE CLOSING MONTHS of 2010 are to play host to two essential sister events of the recent Develop Conference in Brighton.

In November Develop in Liverpool will bring together a cross section of the industry at the former European Capital of Culture, while December will play host to Evolve's first outing as a conference in it's own right, taking place in London.

Develop in Liverpool, which is accepting speaker submissions until October 4th this year, is set to look at how the changing industry ecosystem has put an end to the reliable rhythm of console generation cycles.

The event will provide insight into how studios and individuals should approach the developments that are evolving the core platforms, from motion control to games as a service and user-generated content, and consider the realities of making games in the wake of the economic crisis. The speakers will also turn an eye to how to best harness the power and potential of emerging technology like Kinect and Move.

> ***The Develop Conference, whether it's in Brighton or Liverpool, always offers an inspiring line-up of speakers which guarantees that everyone goes home with a better insight than when they arrived.***
>
> Andy Lane, Tandem Events

"Last year's event was widely heralded as a great success so we're looking forward to bringing some of that back again this year," said Andy Lane, head of organiser Tandem Events. "The Develop Conference, whether it's in Brighton or Liverpool, always offers an inspiring line-up of speakers which guarantees that everyone goes home with a better insight than when they arrived."

Develop in Liverpool takes place on November 25th, 2010.

Meanwhile Evolve, which has previously existed as one of the most popular elements of the Develop Conference in Brighton, will address the innovations and platforms spearheading gaming's ongoing drive into more mainstream areas of culture, from the iPad and casual gaming to 3D displays and smartphones.

Panels and sessions will tackle topics such as micropayments, advertising and the relentless rise of the social gaming sector, and ask how game developers can most effectively allocate resources to adapt to this changing market, without wasting money and time on casual gaming's less fruitful avenues.

"Evolve had proved to be a really popular addition to the Develop Conference and has forged a reputation for getting to grips with the opportunities and obstacles that face developers of social, casual, mobile and browser-based games," stated Lane. "It's right at the forefront of how games are developing and with this area of the market changing rapidly, it's a natural progression for it to become a twice annual event with London the obvious choice."

Evolve will take place in London on December 8th, 2010.

www.develop-conference.com

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HTML5 - a new standard for web games?

Spil Games says the days are numbered for Adobe Flash given the rise of mobile ■ $50,000 prize fund opens for web devs…

Apple's preferred HTML5 standard will inevitably overtake Flash as the web game platform of choice, says the boss of a popular web games portal.

Spil Games CEO Peter Driessen said Apple CEO Steve Jobs "was right when he said Flash isn't working on mobile systems – that's what I hear from developers as well."

Driessen announced last month that Spil's group of 47 game websites – which together draw in some 130 million users per month – are now all based on the HTML5 standard, ensuring they play on the iPhone and iPad as well as a string of other devices.

And as a further sign of intent, Spil is also launching a $50,000 contest for developers to make popular games in HTML5.

"I believe HTML5 will rise above Flash on mobile," Driessen told *Develop*.

"In fact I think in three years the majority of web games will be in HTML5. It's inevitable that it will become the programming standard of the future."

Driessen confessed that the key reason why it has moved away from Flash is because of Apple's reluctance to incorporate it into its glossy iPhone and iPad mobile devices.

Asked whether there's a danger in placing faith in a nascent format which Apple could easily abandon just as swiftly as it did Flash, Driessen insisted Adobe's alternative is not future-proof in any event.

"Flash on PC is great, but it's the mobile devices – especially those with touch screens – where the standard begins to suffer. Flash on the Android operating system is not very efficient, it hasn't been a success so far, and we see future problems there.

"I don't think Apple will back off from using HTML5; it really is the next big thing, and I think Apple will continue to support until it becomes the standard.

"It will become the big game changer, and our move to HTML5 will be the beginning of a revolution where more developers will move away from Flash and produce great content."

It is not known whether the executive arm of Apple sees Spil's move as complementary to its own business priorities.

The internet and mobile devices giant currently controls the flow of iPad and iPhone games through its own App Store. Spil's web portal will remove some of that control.

But Driessen remains positive: "Steve Jobs said he's a big supporter of HTML5, so I think he'll be happy with our decision. But of course for Apple, this enables a platform that comes via the App Store."

For more information visit www.spilgames.com

DEVELOP DIARY

YOUR COMPLETE GAMES DEVELOPMENT EVENT CALENDAR FOR THE MONTHS AHEAD…

london games conference 2010

LONDON GAMES CONFERENCE
November 4th
BAFTA, London
www.develop-online.net

With a theme of 'Survival And Profit In A Changing Industry', this year's London Games Conference will focus on shifts in revenues, platforms and various distribution methods for game content.

Over 200 delegates are expected at the event, which is sponsored by IGN UK, Virgin Gaming, InComm and The Hut. Trade body UKIE has offered its endorsement and inclusion for the event within the London Games Festival this autumn.

Chief analyst Ben Keen will present an exclusive Screen Digest summary of current and future revenue distribution for the games industry.

There will also be big name keynotes, panel sessions and a number of workshops.

SEPTEMBER 2010

DIGITAL SPARK
September 1st to 2nd
Abertay, Scotland
www.digitalspark.abertay.ac.uk

FUTURE GAME ON
September 9th to 10th
Paris, France
www.futuregameon.com

TOKYO GAME SHOW
September 16th to 19th
Tokyo, Japan
http://tgs.cesa.or.jp/english

MCV PUB QUIZ
September 23rd
London, England
www.mcvuk.com

DEVELOP PUB QUIZ
September 29th
London, England
www.develop-online.net

OCTOBER 2010

EUROGAMER EXPO 2010
October 1st to 3rd
London, England
expo.eurogamer.net

LONDON GAMES FESTIVAL
October 1st to November 4th
London, England
www.londongamesfestival.co.uk

GDC ONLINE
October 5th to 8th
Austin, Texas
www.gdconline.com

DEVELOP FOOTBALL CHALLENGE
October 8th
London , England
www.develop-online.net

PCR FOOTBALL CHALLENGE
October 15th
London , England
www.pcr-online.biz

CASUAL CONNECT KYIV
October 21st to 23rd
Kyiv, Ukraine
kyiv.casualconnect.org

NOVEMBER 2010

LONDON GAMES CONFERENCE
November 4th
London, England
www.develop-online.net

MONTREAL INTERNATIONAL GAME SUMMIT
November 8th to 14th
Montreal, Canada
sijm.ca/2010

NEON 10
November 8th to 14th
Dundee, Scotland
www.northeastofnorth.com

UNITE 2010 CONFERENCE
November 10th to 12th
Old Montreal, Canada
unity3d.com/unite

GAME CONNECTION
November 16th to 18th
Lyon, France
www.game-connection.com/events

ME AWARDS 2010
November 18th
London, England
www.mobile-ent.biz

IGNITION ENTERTAINMENT

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"The high quality, fluid performances seen in El Shaddai are delivered using *morpheme*."

Sawaki Takeyasu, Director of El Shaddai at Tokyo's UTV Ignition studio

UTV IGNITION entertainment

El Shaddai

morpheme advanced animation system

naturalmotion

Image courtesy of Ignition Entertainment

www.naturalmotion.com

World*View*

Our monthly digest of global games news…

DEALS

3D character animation specialist **Mixamo** has secured a deal that will see it offer integrated support for **Blender** users.

Epiphany has secured a licensing deal that will see it use **xaitment**'s five AI tools to develop fantasy RTS *Frozen Hearth*.

Zynga has announced it has acquired **Conduit Labs**, a Boston-based social games developer.

Image Metrics has signed a deal with mo-cap outfit **Centroid** that will see them provide an integrated animation solution.

ZeniMax has acquired French outfit **Arkane Studios**.

Tools training firm **Bluegfx** has signed an exclusive European deal with fellow online-based company **Digital Tutors**.

Trinigy has announced integrated support for **Autodesk** FBX asset exchange in Vision Engine 8.

THQ has licensed **Gamebryo** LightSpeed in a multiplatform deal.

New studio **Whiteout** has licensed **Crytek**'s CryEngine 3 for its as-yet unspecified first project.

DUNDEE RECRUITMENT FRENZY

Major studios from across the UK and Europe have sent recuitment representitives to Dundee, Scotland, following the recent wave of redundancies at Realtime Worlds and Cohort Studio.

Crytek, Codemasters, Blitz, Sony, Jagex, Creative Assembly and Activision have all made moves to hire some of the ex-RTW and Cohort talent who found themselves out of work following a difficult period for both studios. Recruitment events have been staged by some of the studios, while interviews, both casual and formal, have been held by all at various hotels and sites across the Scottish city.

"If we can assist in offering new positions to the suitable candidates with Codemasters then we will be more than happy to help at this troubled time," said Codemasters talent acquisition manager Simon Miles.

"We think Realtime Worlds staff will be pleasantly surprised at the opportunities we can offer them," said Blitz CEO Philip Oliver.

For the latest updates on this story visit **www.develop-online.net**

UK

TIGA TO LAUNCH SELF PUBLISHING SERVICES

Tiga has announced a series of services for studios involved self-publishing titles.

The new services include a dedicated, members-only self-publishing information area of the Tiga website and the formation of a self publishing group of key industry professionals meeting quarterly to share information.

"The decision to ramp up our self publishing services is born out of the incredible diversity that now exists within the UK interactive sector. Developers now have access to more options in terms of platforms, genres, distribution and funding," explained Tiga CEO Dr Richard Wilson.

The full service will launch this Autumn.

www.tiga.org

FINLAND/USA

ROVIO TAKES ANGRY BIRDS TO HOLLYWOOD

Rovio is reported to be approaching Hollywood studios with a view to make it's iPhone hit *Angry Birds* into a movie.

According to the source, members of Rovio have been visiting Hollywood studios in recent weeks, weighing up ancillary offers.

Rovio's trip the movie industry's heartland is based on the fact that guaranteeing success on the iPhone is a hard thing to do.

"It doesn't make sense [to produce a slate of different games] when you have a hit of any caliber," CEO of Rovio Mobile Mikael Hed, told Daily Variety. "When you create brand equity, to do that again would be a difficult task rather than nurture and build around what you have."

www.rovio.com

USA

IGDA HIRES NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The International Game Developers Association (IGDA) has hired Gordon Bellamy as its new acting executive director.

Bellamy has been on the association's board of directors since 2009, serving as its chair since March of this year. Brian Robbins is to take over that role in Bellamy's absence.

"In the past year I have seen first hand the amount of passion, energy and dedication that Gordon brings to his work with the IGDA," said Robbins.

"As acting executive director I am confident that Gordon will help lead us through the changes we as an organization have to make to better serve our members, and the industry as a whole."

www.igda.org

CANADA

VORTEX COMPETITION CALLS FOR UNDISCOVERED TALENT

The organisers of the Vortex Videogame Conference have made a call for aspiring games makers to enter the development competition element of the Ontario event.

The Canadian competition is hosted by the federally incorporated charity McLuhan Festival of the Future, and is taking place this year at the new Toronto International Film Festival Bell Lightbox venue in Toronto.

"We are delighted to partner with DIG as it provides us with the opportunity to increase the exposure of emerging entrepreneurs to the videogame industry throughout Ontario," said Vortex MD Sari Ruda.

The Vortex competition takes place from from October 2010 to February 2011. The main conference is to take place in Toronto on three separate days: October 27th 2010, november 9th 2010, and February 9th 2011. The London, Ontario arm of the conference occurs on November 18th 2010.

vortexcompetition.com

USA

DOUBLE FINE SIGNS UP WITH THQ

Publisher THQ has signed two of Double Fine's upcoming four games, the first being *Costume Quest* – a downloadable Halloween-based adventure RPG, set for release on 360 and PS3 in October.

Schafer, the Double Fine studio president, revealed last month that his team had been covertly concepting numerous small digital titles whilst developing the EA-published *Brutal Legend*.

And when EA pulled the plug on a *Brutal Legend* sequel, Schafer and his team pitched the four games to various publishers.

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UK ALL-PARTY GAMES GROUP REFORMED

The All-Party Parliamentary Group for the Computer and Video Games Industry in the UK has been reformed with a new executive committee.

The group, comprised of members of every major political party in the UK, was formed last year with a remit to "provide a forum to discuss business issues affecting video games software developers, to develop policies to enhance the sector and to champion an industry that responsibly creates content for an audience ranging from children to adults."

This latest reformation of the group has set out to provide a parliamentary forum to discuss industry issues including Games Tax Relief, skills and training, and the relationship between industry and universities.

The Group will be co-chaired by the Culture, Media, Olympics and Sport Select Committee Chair, John Whittingdale OBE MP and the former Labour Minister, Tom Watson MP.

"I am delighted that the All-Party Group has been reformed with a talented and diverse range of parliamentarians," commented Tiga CEO Dr Richard Wilson.

www.publications.parliament.uk

A news report from *1UP* states that THQ's second Double Fine game will be a third-person adventure, set for release in 2011.

"We wanted to make a big impression with these, our first downloadable games ever," said Schafer.

"So we are coming out swinging with two great adventures from two of the most creative minds in the company."

THQ exec Martin Good said that digital distribution platforms were "an important growth initiative" for the company.

www.doublefine.com

UK

REVOLVER HOSTING DUNDEE START-UPS WORKSHOP

Revolver, working in conjunction with Interactive Tayside, is to host a workshop for those looking to launch their own start up studios in Dundee.

Designed for developers who have recently found themselves redundant and existing start-ups, the workshop will bring together a number of speakers offering advice on creating a fully-functioning studio.

"The most exciting areas in the games market are in the independent areas where smaller companies are targeting new platforms and digital distribution channels," said Brian Baglow, Revolver's head of interactive entertainment.

"Starting a new company can be daunting, so we've lined up a range of experts to discuss the issues a new studio will face."

Speakers will include representatives from Scottish Enterprise, Blitz and Abertay University.

The workshop is taking place in the Scottish Enterprise Dundee offices at 12pm on Tuesday August 31st.

revolver-pr.co.uk

USA

INSTANTACTION REVEALS NEW MUSIC TITLE

InstantAction has revealed its new free-to-play online music-rhythm game *Instant Jam* at GDC Europe today.

According to InstantAction the game, which is currently available in a Facebook Beta version, is set to be embeddable anywhere online in its final version, and to make use of the individual music libraries of consumers. It will also operate with any USB guitar controllers.

"We created *Instant Jam* because we believe people should be able to play along to any song from any band or any genre they like, rather than be confined to a handful of pre-set songs chosen for the game they're playing," said InstantAction CEO Louis Castle.

"We also strongly believe that games – like other forms of entertainment media – should be easier for consumers to discover, try, enjoy and share. Instant Jam embodies all of this."

The new game will be made available first on the PC, with Mac and Flash versions to follow afterward.

www.instantaction.com

SAY WHAT?!

"I am disgusted and angry. It's hard to believe that any citizen of our country would wish to buy such a thoroughly un-British game."

*UK Defence Secretary **Liam Fox** declares his distaste for EA's upcoming Medal of Honor in no uncertain terms.*

"Dr Fox was expressing a personal view and we understand why some people might find the subject matter of the game offensive."

*A spokesperson from the **Department for Culture, Media and Sport** refuses to back Fox's statement.*

"I don't know why films and books set in Afghanistan don't get flack, yet [games] do."

*EA Games president **Frank Gibeau** bites back at Medal of Honor detractors.*

"The point remains that part of this game allows you to play the part of the Taliban attacking ISAF troops in central Helmand."

*A spokesperson for **Dr Fox** get in with the last word, and the whole sorry saga hopefully rumbles to a close.*

INDUSTRY ANALYSIS
SPONSORED BY DEEP SILVER

COMMENT: BUSINESS

The Chinese Way

by Nick Gibson, Games Investor Consulting

This year China is likely to become the third largest games producer in the world. A burst of acquisitions of US games companies by Chinese games companies earlier this year signifies the growing confidence and financial strength of the Chinese games sector and may herald a new phase in the globalisation of the industry.

This month I'll analyse what China's meteoric rise into the top tier of global games territories means for the Western market.

First, Shanda Games spent $80 million acquiring Mochi Media in January 2010; then came The9's $20 million majority acquisition of Red 5 Studios in March; and most recently Perfect World took a majority stake in Runic Games in May for $8.4 million. They represent the first three transactions in the western games market by a sector that barely existed five years ago.

Mimicking recent global economic trends, Chinese games companies have prospered over the last few years whilst North America and Europe have suffered ever-declining sales and their largest indigenous publishers have struggled to avoid falling revenues and losses. China's success has been achieved without material sales outside of the Asian continent. This minimal global influence is clearly not going to last and these recent US transactions highlight one potential route into the Western market.

CROWDED HOUSE

The Chinese online games market is expected to grow around 30 per cent this year to reach $4.6bn and, whilst the rate of growth may slow down, it still has considerable room for long-term expansion.

China already houses the largest internet user-base in the world at around 400 million, but this still represents less than a third of the population, in comparison to around 75-85 per cent for most Western countries.

It has an increasingly tech literate, wealthy and middle class populace benefiting from a buoyant economy and rampant entrepreneurialism. Both the number but also the monthly and lifetime value of Chinese gamers is far from peaking.

From this fertile primordial games market has arisen hundreds of indigenous games ventures, around a dozen of which will generate over $100 million in sales this year. The largest – online and mobile giant Tencent's games business – recorded $300 million in sales during its most recent quarter, overtaking THQ, Take 2 and Ubisoft.

> **“Chinese gaming and Chinese games companies have prospered in the last few years whilst North America and Europe have suffered declining sales.”**

The next two, Netease and Shanda Games, are expected to reach $800 million and $700m million turnovers respectively in 2010. More impressive is the fact that almost all of these companies are not only profitable but massively so. 50 per cent-plus net profit margins are not unheard of. In addition to throwing off sizeable amounts of cash, many of these businesses have sought to bolster their balance sheets with IPOs and additional fund raising. Giant Interactive, a mid-tier publisher with just $200 million in expected sales in 2010, currently has some $700 million in liquid assets – more than the combined cash reserves of THQ, Take 2 and Ubisoft – whilst the top-seven have some $5.2 billion to spend in aggregate. The $108.4 million spent so far would appear, therefore, a drop in the ocean. There is clearly the capability, but is there the appetite to make more purchases in the West?

AN ACQUIRING TASTE

The answer, for me, is a conditional yes. The West represents a huge, mature market whose player base is considerably more valuable than those found in China. However, unless there is a radical change in direction, Chinese companies are only going to be interested in network games businesses in the West; buying a traditional games developer or publisher would result in unwelcome earnings dilution, lumber them with business practices, technologies and infrastructure that are both alien and largely irrelevant to them.

All three acquisitions this year were of network games ventures that complement the Chinese companies' businesses.

The Chinese companies will primarily seek to apply their capital and business know-how to Western-developed network games, although we also expect more Chinese publishers to follow Korean publishers' leads and establish North American and European operations to exploit their existing Chinese-developed IP.

I don't believe Western expansion will be an investment priority for several years given the rate at which the Chinese and pan-Asian markets are growing. The Chinese hordes are amassing but there will be no invasion just yet.

However, I expect to see sporadic additional acquisitions being made in the West as the Chinese flex their financial muscles, and use opportunistic acquisitions and investments to 'learn' the Western market and build a foundation for future operations.

In the longer term, the question of whether China will become significant investors in the Western games market is, in my mind, more a case of when, rather than if.

Above: Perfect World now owns a majority stake in Runic Games, creator of Torchlight

Nick Gibson is a director at Games Investor Consulting, providing research, strategy consulting and corporate finance services to the games, media and finance industries.
www.gamesinvestor.com

COMMENT: DESIGN

Replay Value

by **Billy Thomson,** Ruffian Games

Above: Bomberman

A few weeks ago a game developer I know kicked off a bit of a debate on Facebook about his annoyance at people constantly claiming that pre-owned games were responsible for killing the games market.

It was his opinion that it was the lack of replay value in the games that caused people to trade them in rather than the desire to make some easy money. A few other developers jumped on his original post with their opinions with "it's the retailers pushing pre-owned on the day of release," and "DLC is the only way to keep games alive post release," or "digital downloads are the future of games," and even "it's stories that are killing games. Games equal toys plus rules."

I've written about my views on the pre-owned market before, so it's a given that I believe that pre-owned games are in some way having a negative effect on the games industry. But I do agree with his point about the lack of replay value being at the heart of the problem.

After all, there would be a far smaller number of games available in the pre-owned market if more people had a desire to continue playing them over an extended period of time. I can also see the merit in most of the other statements, although I have to say that the comment about stories killing games initially had me riled, but after giving it more thought I had to admit that it actually does make a fair bit of sense.

NEVERENDING STORY

I personally prefer games to have a strong central storyline that keeps me engaged throughout the course of the game. I feel like I've got value for money when I get to experience a good story with solid, believable characters and varied sets of objectives. The thing is, if I'm completely honest, I tend to only play these games once all the way through and very rarely come back to them again. So while my favourite, most memorable games tend to be story driven, they're not the kind of games I keep coming back to. And the only reason I never trade them in is my distaste for the pre-owned market. I can see why your average gamer trades in the majority of their games rather than holding on to them.

So, which games do I come back to continuously? Looking back at the titles that have eaten most of my time over the years, they tend to be games with fairly simple rules and a set of mechanics that are easy to pick up and play. Also they offer a level of depth that will see you gain a true mastery of the game if you put in the time.

> ***"I really hope that there are a few developers out there working hard to try to think about how they can make new innovative games built on simple rules, with an obvious goal and intuitive controls."***

These games generally get better over time through repeated play, due to the fact that you gain the ability to do more with them, the more you understand how they work and the more you practice your newly learned techniques.

In my own personal experience, these games fall into several different genres like racing, fighting, sports, first-person shooters, turn based strategy – and a few I find difficult to categorise, like *Bomberman* and *Bust a Move*.

Each of these types of game can be played alone, but they truly come to life when you play them with other people. The combination of the simple rules, depth of gameplay and the ability to sit on the same couch with your mates – where multiplayer is available at the same time on the same screen – and dig them in the ribs as you take the piss out of them when you win, all add up to a gameplay experience that can, and does, change each time you play.

PLAY IT AGAIN SAM

You don't have the same experience each time you play because you're not playing through the same story each time. You're simply obeying a simple set of rules, aiming for the same goal and ultimately testing your skills against your opponent.

I still love story-driven, cinematic triple-A blockbuster games, but I really hope there are a few developers out there working hard to try to think about how they can make new innovative games built on simple rules, with an obvious goal and an intuitive set of controls and a level of depth that truly rewards replay. It seems like this approach will be the best way to avoid the game being traded in after a single playthrough. I know I'd hold onto it anyway.

Billy Thomson is the creative director of newly-formed developer Ruffian Games. Billy has over 13 years experience of designing video games, including design roles on *Grand Theft Auto* and *GTA2*, before working as lead designer on Realtime Worlds' celebrated *Crackdown*.
www.ruffiangames.com

COMMENT: INDUSTRY

Online? Have we thought what this really means?

by David Braben

Warcraft's online structure offers something of an answer to piracy

Over the last year or so, I've heard all sorts of statements about the possible transition to an online world, and that it might be the saviour of our industry. Four statements stand out. Much of what is said sounds a little like wishful thinking, rather than being based upon sound fact, but each is worthy of some thought:

1. 'The online world changes week-by-week – dev cycles need to be measured in small numbers of weeks to respond': Perhaps if paraphrased as 'throw any old rubbish out there, and only develop further the ideas that gain traction' we can highlight where the problem lies – as on the face of it this sounds like a good idea – but if you do that, you expose yourself to a mêlée of unscrupulous companies simply weighing in, responding slightly more quickly or at least dividing the market.

We have seen this with the multiple shockingly similar farming games on Facebook, like *Farm Town*, and the slightly later *FarmVille*. One or two may make it, but it is rarely the original creator. This should change as soon as we start to see more high quality games arriving in this space. We saw something similar at the very dawn of our industry in the early '80s – where there was also a cavalier attitude to other people's IP, and successful games were copied mercilessly, but this changed too.

2. 'You don't need a publisher to publish online. It's great – developers get the lion's share of the money': These two are often said in virtually the same breath, but the naivety this shows is pretty surprising. The route to market is the key element here. It is true that services like XBLA, PSN and WiiWare potentially offer a great deal of freedom, but we should not ignore the primary publishing function – that of bringing a game to potential customers – is being done by Microsoft, Sony, or Nintendo.

It is true that it does bring a great deal of freedom, and yes a greater share of the revenue, but that too may change. It may go the route of the Apple App Store or Google's Android Store; where 99c games are commonplace, or there may be an attempt to maintain and increase quality. The route to market is still the issue, and whoever owns the portal is in a strong position.

> ***"As an industry, we have rarely had a sustained period of stability. Let's embrace it as we have before, but do so with our eyes open, to dodge the mistakes of the past."***

3. 'Piracy is easy to combat with online gaming. Pre-owned will no longer be a problem': Again, this is true, but experience shows it is unlikely to last. There are quite a few worrying aspects to this. Some of the online distribution services are already now damaged by piracy – look at the recent ruling against Apple, suggesting 'jail-breaking' the iPhone is legitimate (though I'll be surprised if Apple does not appeal, it has not happened at time of going to press).

That is a very dangerous precedent. The standard answer that is brought out is that online play is the answer. This is of course, true – look at *Warcraft*. The downside to this is the maintenance of back-end servers for each game; not a problem while the game is new, but when are the servers and support turned off? Eventually this time will come, and where are the genuine players left then? And what about single player? The key thing is to make sure common platform functionality – offered by Live and PSN – is used rather than bespoke servers, but this currently doesn't address the pre-owned issue.

4. 'Web-based games are a new platform': This is another misconception. There are many ways to bring a web-based game to market. Flash and Unity for example, but each of these only cover a subset of the web, and offer a lower performance than many players now expect. In effect the web is a collection of new, rapidly-changing platforms which are a challenge to monetise, and like with the mobile world of the '90s, only a few will win out.

All of the above statements have elements of truth within them, but if we accept them at face value we expose ourselves to huge problems, as it is unlikely to pan out as indicated above. To most people, online equates to 'free stuff', and for many there is little compunction to downloading games 'that I probably wouldn't have bought anyway.' Online distribution makes this easier, not harder, as it dispenses with the obvious symbol of collecting bought games. These changes are also big opportunities; we simply need to avoid complacency, and co-operate.

As an industry, we have rarely had a sustained period of stability. Let's embrace it as we have before, but do so with our eyes open, to dodge the mistakes of the past.

David Braben is the founder of Cambridge-based Frontier Developments. Best known as the co-creator of *Elite*, Braben has contributed to, designed or overseen a number of other projects including *Frontier: Elite II*, *Dog's Life*, *Thrillville* and *LostWinds*. Frontier is currently developing his next title, *The Outsider*. He is also closely involved with Skillset.
www.frontier.co.uk

INDUSTRY ANALYSIS
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COMMENT: OPINION

Caught in .NET

by Allan Murphy, Microsoft

Ben Board has left his keyboard for a moment, so I thought it'd be a great time for a confession. Working as an engineer in Microsoft's Advanced Technology Group, it became a bit embarrassing that I couldn't write a competent Windows application. While learning to do that, I figured I should do it with the all new – to me, not the rest of the world – .NET framework and C#. As a console coder of some 17 years I regarded this as a necessary evil, and an unwanted and ideally brief departure from the wonderful grinding world of console optimization in C++, and frankly as far beneath C++ as I can get without having to actually make any hardware.

In common with all good coders, I fear change. So to be frank, I kind of didn't want to learn managed code, and I certainly didn't want to like managed code. Unfortunately, managed has a lot to like about it; like a goth gradually accepting dark purple as a gateway drug to other brighter colours and ultimately smiling, I did grow to like it.

It's just that the .NET framework provides swathes of useful functionality you'd normally have to at least fiddle with in C++, if not outright engineer from scratch, or kludge/steal/copy/borrow. And I grudgingly admit to not worrying about who owns what memory is liberating; my fingers normally start to shake when I type 'new' and I often reflexively delete the whole line without thinking, while wondering why I feel dirty and used.

TALKING INTELLISENSE

But what broke me was build times and Intellisense support – I mean, it'd be easy to hate if it wasn't so bloody helpful. I freely admit that at first I thought I had my dependencies all wrong and wasn't building stuff correctly – managed builds are unfeasibly quick.

Having VS insert stubs for methods I've just dreamt up on the spot, re-ordering parameters project wide, resolve missing references for me, suggest parameter sets and names for overloads, and pop one-line descriptions of function usage as I type them in is an enormous productivity boost. It's like trying to hate Twiki off of *Buck Rogers* – you might want to, but you just can't stay mad at the little guy. Sure, you like the idea of Colonel Wilma Deering, but she is quite high maintenance.

Why am I telling you this? Our team has been doing some work with Windows Phone 7 and mobile developers recently. Windows Phone 7 development is managed only in C#, via XNA Game Studio, and supported by the XNA Framework. The word 'only', raised a lot of developer eyebrows when we first presented it, and I can completely understand why – most phone development is native, for a start.

> ***Performance issues have been pleasantly easy to tackle. Managed code has some different performance areas to watch, but those are well understood and titles have no problems reaching 30fps.***

Our experience as developers, racing towards finishing the first WP7 games, has been those initial fears of nightmarish rewrites and hard graft having been allayed. And most developers have come to like managed code, for the reasons above, but also because the XNA framework provides a great deal of functionality, sitting on top of the .NET Compact Framework. Compact in this case is relative – the full Windows .NET framework distribution weighs in at 82Mb. We've had several reports of swathes of mobile code being replaced with a couple of lines of C# or calls into XNA framework classes. The framework provides a built-in, easily extensible content export pipeline that handles sprites, textures, geometry, sound effects, music, movies and so on. The Windows Phone 7 flavour of the framework includes support for touch input, accelerometer, geolocation and Xbox LIVE services, too.

PERFORMING MIRACLES

Performance issues have been pleasantly easy to tackle, so far. There have been some different performance areas to watch, for sure, but those are well understood and titles have no problem reaching 30fps. In the main, monitoring garbage collection is the most unfamiliar to native programmers; however, this is no difficult task, and also a very small price compared to the cost of hand-managing memory in a traditional native situation. If you are accustomed to avoiding allocating at all during gameplay, you are already home and dry.

There's no avoiding that translating existing C++ to C# for WP7 can only be automated to a certain extent (and that ignores codebase maintenance issues in the longer term). However, here's a dangerous idea: C# to C++ is completely automatable. MSIL recompilers can spit out C++ easily.

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XBOX LIVE
Games
Me

Above: Windows Phone 7 development is managed in C#, via XNA Game Studio

Allan Murphy has worked in the game industry for over 17 years, and on consoles since the early '90s. He has shipped several titles and worked on a wide variety of engine technology, and currently works for Microsoft in the Advanced Technology Group (ATG) where he helps developers create games across a range of Microsoft platforms.

Traveller's Tales have been making brilliant games for more than 18 years, with over 50 million copies sold to date. As part of Warner Bros, we have exciting plans for future titles based on the world's biggest entertainment properties - and we're now recruiting for the following positions:

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Gameplay Programmers of all Levels – URGENT

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Audio/Video Engine Programmer

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For more details on any of these opportunities please contact Hollie Heraghty at Aardvark Swift on the number below or via email at: hollie@aswift.com

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LEGO
Harry Potter

Call for Proposals – Industrial Research 2010-2011

UCL
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The EngD VEIV Centre is now inviting proposals from industrial and public parties to sponsor engineering doctorate students in computer graphics, graphical modelling, imaging and interfaces. Potential sponsors are invited to UCL Roberts Building (front desk) on 28th September 2010, 2pm to discuss possible projects. Proposals will be accepted until 28th January 2011.

Supported by EPSRC funding, an EngD VEIV student is a first-class engineer or designer with the critical depth and stamina to meet the demands of the entrepreneurial economy. Our students undertake a bespoke, one-year technical training course, followed by three years' full-time work on their sponsor's project.

Additional training is offered throughout. The cost of sponsorship is typically around £36,000 over four years, with occasional concessions offered to charitable sponsors.

Throughout 2010-2011 the EngD VEIV Centre is welcoming in particular proposals addressing issues in graphics and the brain. We anticipate that projects in this field will pertain to visual systems, visualisation, interfaces or interactions, but we are open to all other suggestions for research.

UCL

EPSRC
Engineering and Physical Sciences
Research Council

Preliminary expressions of interest should be emailed directly to the EngD Centre Manager, **Dr Jamie O'Brien** at: j.obrien@cs.ucl.ac.uk.

Further details about EngD VEIV are available via our website http://engdveiv.cs.ucl.ac.uk/

BETA

DEVELOPMENT FEATURES, INTERVIEWS, ESSAYS & MORE

> **"We offer something unique that other publishers seem to have forgotten."**
> Mark Cale, System 3, p38

The Oliver brothers talk Blitz spirit

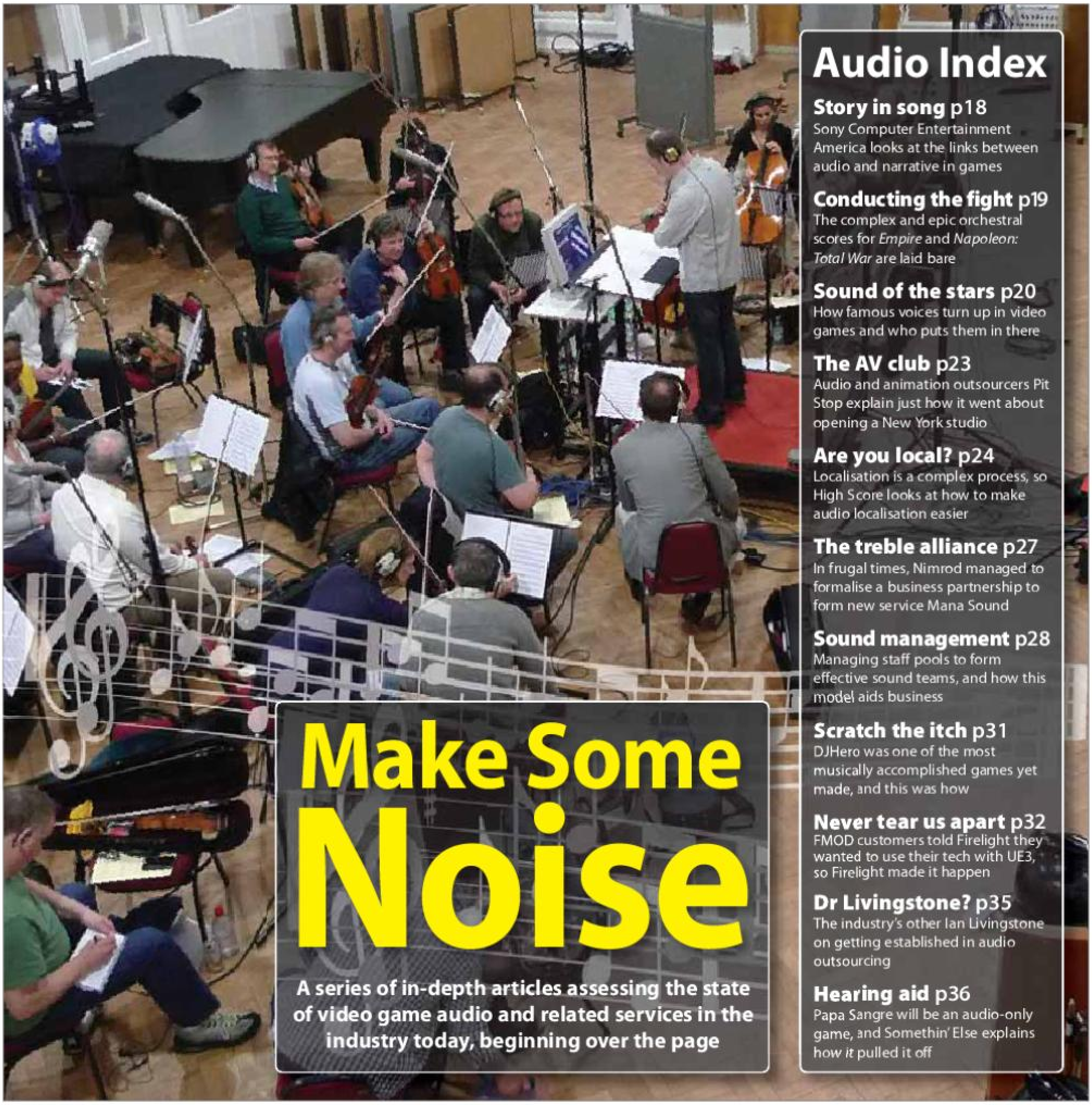
p44

Dare to be Digital's new talent hunt

p40

Self-publishing advice

p48



Make Some Noise

A series of in-depth articles assessing the state of video game audio and related services in the industry today, beginning over the page

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Story in song p18
Sony Computer Entertainment America looks at the links between audio and narrative in games

Conducting the fight p19
The complex and epic orchestral scores for *Empire* and *Napoleon: Total War* are laid bare

Sound of the stars p20
How famous voices turn up in video games and who puts them in there

The AV club p23
Audio and animation outsourcers Pit Stop explain just how it went about opening a New York studio

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Localisation is a complex process, so High Score looks at how to make audio localisation easier

The treble alliance p27
In frugal times, Nimrod managed to formalise a business partnership to form new service Mana Sound

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Managing staff pools to form effective sound teams, and how this model aids business

Scratch the itch p31
DJHero was one of the most musically accomplished games yet made, and this was how

Never tear us apart p32
FMOD customers told Firelight they wanted to use their tech with UE3, so Firelight made it happen

Dr Livingstone? p35
The industry's other Ian Livingstone on getting established in audio outsourcing

Hearing aid p36
Papa Sangre will be an audio-only game, and Somethin' Else explains how *it* pulled it off

Telling a story through song

SCEA Santa Monica sound designer **Steve Johnson**, whose credits appear on titles like the God of War series and ThatGameCompany's Flower, takes a look at the relationship between narrative and audio and asseses whether these mutually exclusive enterprises can ever work together seamlessly…

Our industry loves Hollywood. We're always borrowing their writers, directors, and actors.

Why? If I had to pick a single reason other than Star Power I'd say the quality storytelling. While excellent movies start with excellent stories, games often originate from good gameplay instead. But everyone has felt the impact of a good story; the connection with the characters, caring about what happens to them, getting wrapped up in their world. So developers go to great lengths to add story, and on the list go great music, dialogue, and sound effects. In the end the music might be epic and tied to an algorithmically-derived threat level, the dialogue may be complete and star-studded, and everything makes an awesome sound.

Added together though it still might not be quite the experience you'd get in a good movie mix. Why? Probably the dialogue.

Dealbreaker. But even beyond dialogue I think there are things worth mentioning that, if kept in mind, can help us become better storytellers through our audio.

ONCE UPON A TIME

A good place to start; being truly aware of the story to begin with. Thinking about the natural rhythm in the narrative, and enhancing it with deliberate pacing and strong movement between different emotional states as the characters, settings, and circumstances change. Consciously picking the player up and setting them down somewhere else. Easier said than done in games, because we're colouring in a living piece of software, imperfect and lumbering, like Frankenstein. It's not laid out for us as it would be in a linear medium; a colouring book waiting for crayons. It takes selight-of-hand and trickery under the hood, and a lot of help from programmers and designers.

Below: God of War III let Johnson and his team explore narrative through audio

What's required then is tight collaboration between sound and music, engineering, art, and design. Working together to build the house, rather than being called in to decorate it. An environment like that fosters creative input, and is more prepared for the coordinated, dynamic movement in a game that can bring a good story to life.

> ***It's not laid out for us as it would be in a linear medium; a colouring book waiting for crayons. It takes sleight-of-hand and trickery under the hood, and a lot of help from programmers.***

There is likely more discussion about pacing, tone, perspective, mix, characters, conflict, resolution, etcetera. Crosstalk leads to more ideas, and you might just find sound inspiring art or new mechanics.

A good way of killing that approach cold is becoming fixated on a requested list of sounds and music that someone inevitably creates (including ourselves). A good starting point for sure, but the main focus can shift to addressing the checklist. Reacting to requests starts to take priority over proactive storytelling. The bigger picture fades; the forest becomes a lot of individual trees.

One 'big picture' idea that seems among the first to go is the idea that literal, one-to-one pairing of sight and sound is not always the best solution. Everything actually doesn't need to make a sound, or sit evenly in the mix, or spike musically and predictably with each new wave of enemies.

FILM SCHOOL

It never fails that just when I'm thinking game sound has closed the quality and realism gap for good, I see a movie that blows me away, and am reminded that subjective, interpretive audio can be more provocative, and a lot cooler. How ironic that movies often do a better job at getting into the head of protagonists, while in video games you get to be the protagonist? Conveying a story in that manner means being keenly aware of the emotional impact of sounds and instruments, and not being afraid to let go of the reality lifeline. It means thinking of what needs to be said about the character's experience and what is significant to the moment.

Working with ThatGameCompany on *Flower* and their next game *Journey* has made me a better sound designer, because they've trained me to be constantly assessing emotional significance. 'What is this trying to make me feel? What does it make me feel?' So simple a concept that it's easy to skate over, but it's become my secret weapon for extracting all kinds of interesting things from games, film, literature, art, and the rest. It explains what we find lacking too – why we get bored, fatigued or frustrated by something. With *Flower*, creative director Jenova Chen wanted each level to portray a particular set of emotions and the whole game to present a clear three-act structure, all without characters, text, or dialogue. It forced composer Vincent Diamante and I to weigh the emotional worth of every sound and every note, to figure out how they fit into the greater arc, and to work closely with the rest of the team to make it happen.

The more we craft memorable moments and impressions into our work, the more they will resonate with the player. The more we can string those together into something dynamic and meaningful, the less we'll need Hollywood to bail us out.

www.worldwidestudios.net/santamonica

Conducting the battle

Award winning composer **Richard Beddow** explains the painstaking process behind the creation of the Ivor Novello nominated score from Empire: Total War and its sequel Napoleon: Total War…

Above: Period authenticity was essential for those conceiving the audio for the Total War series of games

Twelve years after entering the games industry, currently working as the audio manager for SEGA's studio The Creative Assembly, I have directed audio on various projects including *Total War's* BAFTA winning and Ivor Novello nominated *Empire: Total War* and our latest release *Napoleon: Total War*.

Part of my responsibility is music production, whether written by myself or utilising freelance composers. We are passionate about the games we produce and the high quality we want to deliver.

For this reason I pushed to start recording our scores live – bringing a depth, detail, musicality and level of emotion to the music that's simply unachievable with electronic renditions alone.

Games and budgets have grown, quality bars and expectations raised, and composers now have to develop skills to be able to work with, and get the most out of, live orchestral recordings. This article is an insight in to my approach on our recent productions, which have featured live orchestras, sometimes with choir and solo performances.

CHAMBER MUSIC

Napoleon's score was our most ambitious to date. Conceptually I wanted a period music flavour, exuding 18th Century style, featuring ensembles such as full orchestra, chamber strings, string quartet and choir, giving the game depth and colour, musically.

This pallet would provide a good foundation but the final component would be writing that conveyed characteristics of the period. Not since my university days had I studied the classical composers.

I delved back in to the scores of Mozart, Beethoven and their contemporaries, listening to their music, absorbing the flavours and deciding what felt appropriate for the game and how to use this to create the thematic ideas that were woven in to the fabric of the music, personifying Napoleon and gelling the game together.

Below: The Creative Assembly's composer Richard Beddow

Recording orchestras is quite an involved process. Furthermore, preparation is crucial to minimise risk and reduce stress.

Some important areas beyond composing are:

- Researching and picking musical contractors / musicians.
- Recording venues / engineers
- Orchestrators
- Conductors
- Preparing MIDI files
- Directing the recording session
- Producing and approving final mixes

Over time we've gotten used to having absolute control over the sculpting and creating of our music in the electronic realm with MIDI. However, a live orchestra/choir are living, breathing organisms that interpret our musical intentions via printed instructions on sheet music – things can be interpreted incorrectly, so prepare adequately.

> **“I delved back in to the scores of Mozart, Beethoven and their contemporaries, listening to their music, absorbing the flavours and deciding what felt appropriate.”**

Additionally, as composers we're able to use musical or production techniques that may not translate well to a live performance. These have to be dealt with through orchestration or by keeping certain elements electronic to combine with the live recording.

It takes time exploring the professional recording orchestras, choirs, contractors and engineers, honing in on the ones to trust with recording your score, making calls, listening to demos and obtaining quotes etc.

Once you have settled on your choice, you set the date for the session or sessions and plan everything leading up to that, taking in to account all of your specific project milestone dates.

To minimise surprises, I want to know that when we record, it will sound like when I composed it. Helping achieve that is an orchestrator who'll proof check the instrument parts making any necessary amendments, but I also create fully orchestrated MIDI mock-ups using Digital Performer for each piece. This serves two purposes; firstly that there will be less chance of surprises during the recording and secondly, if for any reason the recording did not happen, we'd always have good quality MIDI versions for backup.

Once finished, MIDI files are produced for the music, note lengths and timings tidied and the structure organised to make it easy for the orchestrator to follow and produce the sheet music.

IT'S ABOUT TIME

During the recording, as producer, time is where the pressure lies. This is spent pouring over the score, following as the orchestra plays, ensuring what we hear is what is written, identifying areas for improvement.

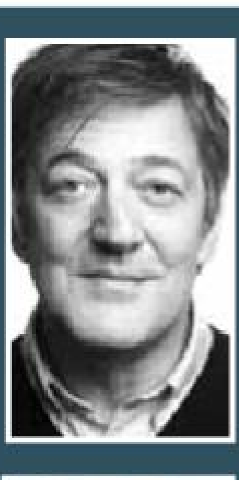
It's a strange situation; on one hand you're excited about hearing your music come alive, on the other mindful of the fact that in each session a certain amount of minutes needs recording and there is high pressure from that – especially when trying to extract maximum quality out of each session.

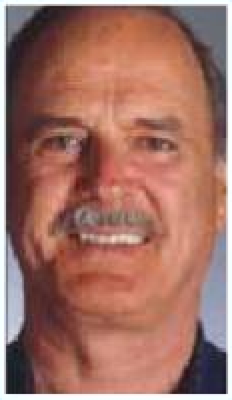
Of the recent scores I've produced, all have been recorded with the entire orchestra performing together. This offers a cohesive recording more naturally balanced. However if mistakes occur everyone has to re-perform until correct, thus adding pressure, while mixing flexibility is also sacrificed.

You can record in instrumental orchestral sections at the expense of intonation and balance, but gaining ability to fix things on a more detailed level mixes better. Which option you choose to select of course depends on your own particular project.

www.creative-assembly.co.uk

The sound of the stars





Side's Creative Director **Andy Emery** has heard some big voices over the years. Casting and working with big name actors in video games, and making sure you always find the right voice for the job, is no easy task…

With more developers looking to engage high profile acting talent on video game projects, it's important to realise the full benefits, as well as potential pitfalls, of this delicate process.

Over the years Side has cast high profile actors for a number of titles. Highlights have included Brian Cox as Leader Visari in *Killzone* (2004), Keeley Hawes as the voice of Lara Croft in *Tomb Raider: Legends* (2005), Stephen Fry as the narrator in *LittleBigPlanet* (2008), John Cleese as The Butler in *Fable III* (2010) and Sir Patrick Stewart and Robert Carlyle as Zobek and Gabriel in *Castlevania: Lords of Shadow* (2010).

There are a number of key points developers must consider to ensure they are targeting the best actor for the job, have the best chance of closing the deal and achieve the performance they had hoped for.

It is easy to get swept away with a 'fantasy' Hollywood cast list for your latest project but profile actors cost a lot of money so there must be solid creative and commercial benefits behind your decisions. The key creative factor is the performance a profile actor can bring to your specific character and the key commercial factor is what additional early interest having this actor on board can generate for your game.

IN GOOD VOICE

Most of the time an actor's performance for your game is going to be mostly a vocal one, so it is important to think about where their strengths lay. If they are best known for their expressive eyes or amazing ability to look like well-known figures they may not be the best person for the job.

Thinking ahead to marketing, consider the actor's recognition factor – are they known globally? Will their television or film audience – especially if known for a certain genre, such as a sci-fi – overlap with potential players? Of course it's a bonus if they are known for their passion for games.

This will all start your casting long list. These are your ideals: the stars you had in mind when creating the character, the person you watched on screen and thought 'that's our hero (or Big Boss)'. It's also good to consider actors whose profiles are rising. Side's casting team puts a lot of time in building relationships with agents, going to theatre, keeping up with film and television careers, even predicting award nominations.

The long list is then cut down to a realistic short list considering budget, known projects the talent is currently involved in, or just a reality check: is Tom Cruise actually going to be interested?

> ***"Too many times we've heard about 'diva' or difficult behaviour. More often than not it is because they've walked into an environment not conducive to performance."***

Now it's time to approach the agents. Don't underestimate the importance of relationships with agents. Trust is a very important factor, especially if this is their first game. There are going to be concerns about exposure – could their involvement affect their career? Side has had to jump the trust hurdle with countless agencies; helping them understand game projects, what the fees are, what the record sessions are like. We're now in the enviable position of having agents whose clients have had such positive experiences with us that they are asking about more opportunities. Whoever is dealing with the agents must understand how to present the game, and how to manage the agent's financial expectations.

With an approach you need to be sure of your budget and record date. You can't just fish around for a high profile's interest or fee. You offer them a role: if they say yes, they're on board. You must also have a character description and script ready to send. If you flounder you lose credibility. Points to cover when negotiating a contract should cover record and pickup dates and what marketing extras you want (interviews, photos, appearances). Be specific and detailed. The vaguer you are, the higher the fee.

Profile talent secured, there are key factors in ensuring you get the best performance from them. Too many times we've heard about 'diva' or difficult behaviour. More often than not it is because they've walked into an environment not conducive to performance.

Don't spring surprises. There shouldn't be a photographer unless photos have been negotiated. Don't have too many people at the session. Everyone may want to meet the talent they've paid for, but there's an intimacy required for good performance.

THE DIRECTOR APPROACH

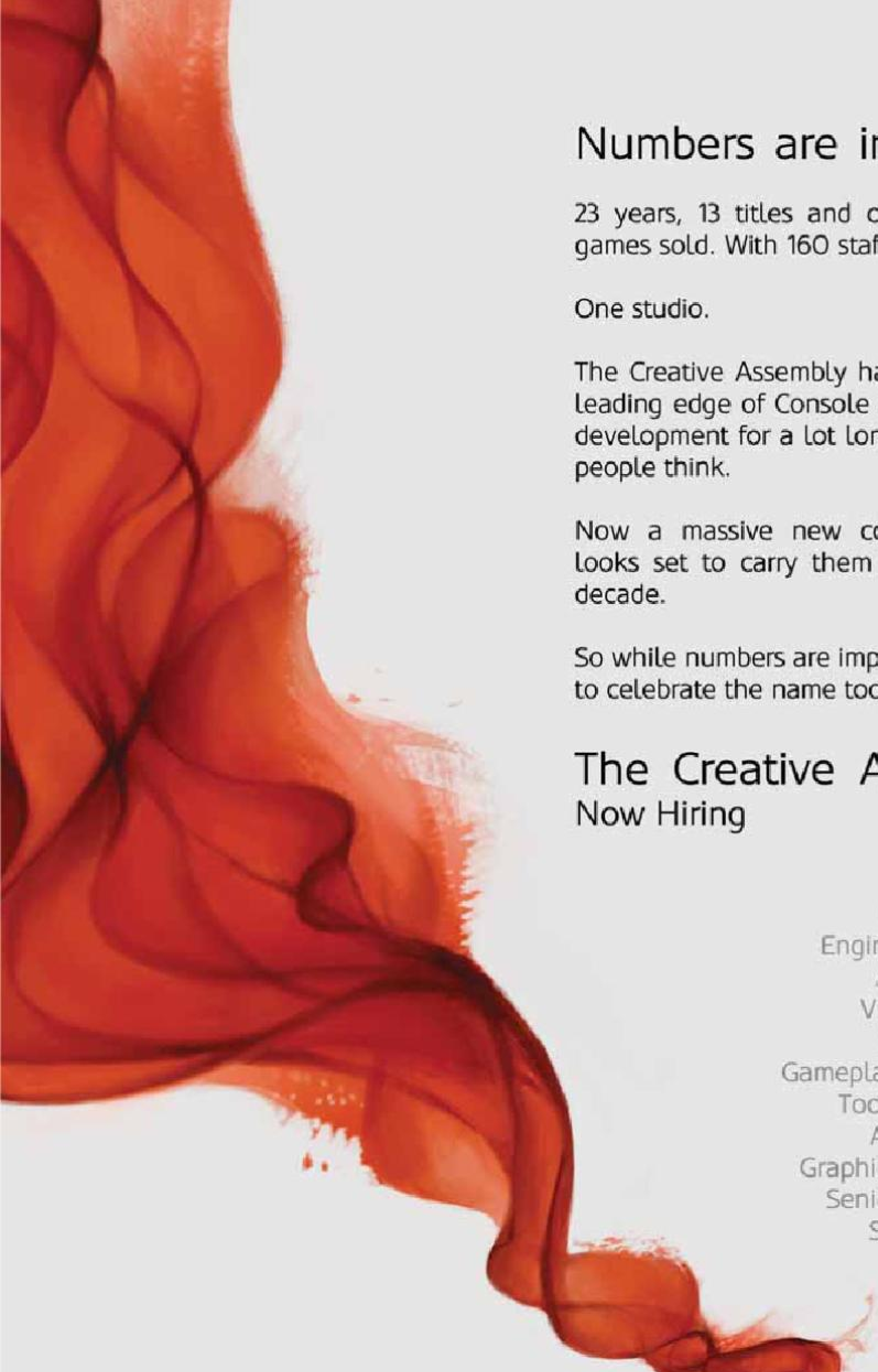
It is also important to have a professional director at the session. There's a misconception that experienced actors don't need a director. But the director is not there to tell them how to do their job, they are there to help them understand the game's world and guide them towards the performance you want, using the language the actor understands.

The attention the video game industry is now getting from other media is clearly reflected in how much more receptive profile actors and their agents are to working on games. As games have a greater focus on story, actors are being provided with more interesting characters. But money is still a key factor in any decision for a profile actor. We have not yet reached a stage where a performance on a game will enhance a high profile actor's CV.

This will change though, especially as more young actors who have grown up with video games become established. Hopefully it will not be long before these actors will be willing to take a punt on a new, interesting game project for a low fee in the same way they would appear in a low-budget indie movie with an exciting new director. Happy casting.

www.side.com

Below: Brian Cox at work with Side



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The AV Club

Pit Stop Productions offers integrated audio and visual solutions for developers in need. MD John Sanderson explains how the firm is expanding into the States...

John Sanderson established Pit Stop Productions in 1997 as a 'one-stop' service for all audio and animation needs. Over the ensuing years the firm has expanded substantially, most recently opening a new office in New York.

Despite the rapid expansion, Sanderson wants Pit Stop to remain a focused force in audio outsourcing. *Develop* was keen to find out about life in an expanding service firm during a troubled business era.

What does Pit Stop Productions Do?
Pit Stop is an audio and visual creative company with its head office based in the North of England. Three years ago we took the step to buy, design and build a facility that could serve as a one-stop shop for clients who required audio and visual creative services. Our head office in the UK serves as a hub to the studios we a year later set up in London, Paris, Rome, Stuttgart and Malaga. These are primarily for voice work. In February this year we opened up In New York City. We are team of 12 talented individuals who really enjoy what we do.

What is Pit Stop New York working on?
We're currently working on the new *Silent Hill* with Vatra and Konami. We have also recently completed a few titles for Sony - *Invizimals, The Fight Lights Out* and *The Shoot*.

What do you think has helped Pit Stop to survive and flourish since 1997?
For Pit Stop it has been our business model. We set out and still hold true to this: strive to offer the best quality audio at a sensible price. It can be a really dangerous line to go down for some publishers and developers, as it may be percieved that if the price is lower than another company's, your quality must be inferior.

However, by setting up an infrastructure whereby you can clearly control your costs, you are able to lower the price. Of course acting and other such creative talent will always have its 'market' value but I do think, especially in the US, publishers and developers in some instances are paying through the nose. That was another reason for setting up in New York. We were paying $1,500 a day for a studio. With the work we had on, it made sense to have our own place. Not being able to control your studio rentals makes it very tough when it comes to keeping a project within budget.

We have spent a lot ot time on developing good working relationships with many companies. New titles often pose audio creative opportunities and challenges. Sometimes they work and sometimes they don't. If you have like minded clients, who are prepared to try new ideas out, I think that helps, as long as they don't end up paying for your mistakes.

> ***"There is a huge amount of potential for unique audio production in games that I believe will come from specialist audio teams."***
>
> John Sanderson, Pit Stop

Later this year we'll release two home grown products: *The Times Table Adventure* and a 3D short movie entitled *Boris! The Dog That Hated Christmas*.

The reason for us doing this is so we can develop our in house skills further, and have the freedom to try out concepts before providing them to clients.

We have multiple revenue streams coming into the business and from that we have consequently strived to build on that each year. Building the studio complex in one year, then moving into Europe the next, then America after that has helped us grow. We also make a huge effort not just to make game audio.

Its a case of one hand washing the other as we like to think we have a grasp on what the target market likes to hear.

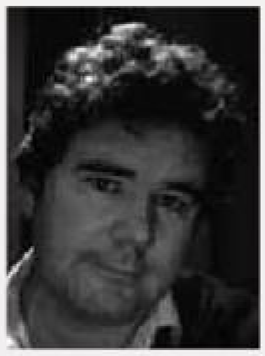
Before going into game audio I was writing musicals and stage shows. Although it may not appear relevant to games as its largely a different market, it taught me the process of how to sit someone down for two and half hours and entertain them.

What are the major issues within video games audio today? How does Pit Stop get around them?
In terms of composition - there is major competition in terms of 'named composers'. They are eagerly looking at the games industry and this is hard for even established game composers to compete with.

Pit Stop has not really tried to get around this, more a case of working through it. If a publisher wants a named composer you have to roll with it. If they want the sound and quality they would expect from such a composer, you have to have put your infrastructure in place. For example, there is a great deal of film music being recorded in the UK, and there are many talented conductors, arrangers and sound engineers doing this music justice. With that in place, a lesser well known composer could put to a publishing marketing team a more compelling case of why they should be using him or her.

There is a huge amount of potential for unique audio production in games that I believe will come from specialist audio teams that really understand the craft of audio for games.

www.pitstopproductions.co.uk



Above: Pit Stop Productions' MD John Sanderson

Below: A first look at Pit Stop's New York studio

Are you local?

With so much of the mood and point of any story laying within the way its characters speak, dialogue localisation can be a difficult art to master. High Score MD **Hugh Edwards** addresses the best way to get game characters speaking a language everyone can understand…

Here at High Score Productions, we are involved in lots of different audio-related activities in the gaming industry – music, sound design, dialogue production, midi-authoring, licensing, project management, etcetera.

However, one area which has grown hugely over the last few years is the localisation of dialogue into other languages.

Historically, dialogue localisation has always been less than perfect – there are always exceptions. Hence the modern-day pigeon-call from publishers that their audiences are now demanding an ever increasing bar with their localised dialogue.

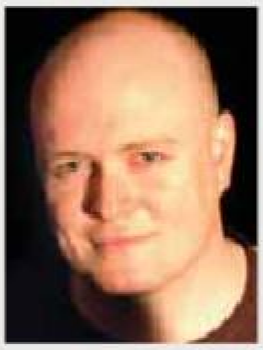
History also shows us that there is a business model which still exists to this day which isn't really suited to localising dialogue, where the developer pays for and manages the English dialogue and the publisher does the FIGS; French, Italian, German and Spanish. This has inherent problems which make it far harder to achieve good quality FIGS dialogue.

This column is aimed at illustrating what the publishers and developers can do to before we the audio-outsourcers are actively involved.

THE DEAF LEADING THE BLIND

Following on from Ciaran Walsh's excellent lecture at Develop '09, involving audio-outsourcers as early as possible is ultimately key. No-one would dream of asking an art-outsourcer to start and complete all the art assets for a game a month before Alpha – audio is just as much a skilled craft and the more time dedicated to it, the better results will be achieved.

Below: Over the years Hugh Edwards has seen the good and the bad of audio localisation



BREAK THE CYCLE

In general, most voice projects are run by first recording the English-language dialogue, and then localising based on the English audio files. As a model, this works well for a variety of reasons. The problem comes with the historic publisher/developer contracted relationship where inevitably you find a different company producing the English as to the FIGS. If your English voice director doesn't pay enough attention to the fact that the dialogue will be localised later, you are going to have issues.

These problems are made much worse if there are time-constraints on the dialogue. For example cut-scenes, which of course are all being developed with the English dialogue. If you consider that German will have around 20 to 30 per cent more syllables than English, then over long sentences you end up either having to rush the German or having over-running sentences – I've actually seen localised titles where the game effectively pauses to wait for FIGS dialogue to finish.

> **“Imagine Obi Wan Kenobi giving his famous speech to Vader and him having to deliver it twice as quick as he did on the film – it would sound ludicrous”**
>
> Hugh Edwards. High Score

Imagine Obi Wan Kenobi giving his famous speech to Vader and him having to deliver it twice as quick as he did on the film – it would sound ludicrous and you would lose all dramatic emphasis.

This is almost always why FIGS reviews historically came back more negative than the English – not enough attention was paid to the English recordings in the first place.

A lot of companies do recognise this now, and I estimate that 50 per cent of our voice projects are English and FIGS. But that still leaves fifty per cent.

So try and break the contractual cycle of the developer having one language and the publisher having the rest – fundamentally, the publisher will be left with whatever he is given from the English, however good or bad, and then it's too late. And if you can't break this cycle, why not employ a FIGS director to sit in on the English recordings? It's a small price to pay – why negate four languages for just one.

www.high-score.co.uk

THE DEVIL'S IN THE DETAIL

There are plenty of other things that can go wrong with dialogue production before we, the audio-outsourcers, are called in.

- We do this for a living, day-in, day-out. If you want any help/advice in the planning stage – just call us.

- Employ a good writer – gone are the days when Bob from the QA team will suffice, just because he has a GCSE in English. *Enslaved* is a prime example of how it should be done.

- ***Streams:*** If you're using multiple studios to develop your game for different platforms, make sure you have one dedicated audio project manager supervising the audio for all streams. This sounds obvious, but it's rarer than you would imagine.

- ***Translations:*** Again, obviously essential, but use a reputable company. Educate them on the game. The number of times I have had native voice-actors question lines which are so obviously mis-translated isn't funny.

- ***Filenames:*** Use numerators preceding the filename structure. E.g., instead of 1_Filename.wav, use 000001_Filename.wav – this will save time and effort later.

Furthermore, be sure to steer away from concatenated filenames if at all possible. Know your base directory-structures for FIGS in advance.

Great FIGS dialogue isn't hard to achieve, but everyone in the dev process needs to do their bit to get it right – and the industry has to stop believing that English is the only language in the world, just because we all speak it. Involve us earlier – we can help.

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The treble ALLIANCE

In an age of media convergence, a knowledge of the best way to handle projects across multiple businesses is an worthy asset. Nimrod Productions details its union with a script writing team to form Mana Sound…

Above: Maurice Suckling of Mustard has joined forces with Nimrod to form Mana

Why would two established, independent and well reputed service companies form an alliance, and in so doing, turn their two companies not into one, but, instead, into three? Doesn't it normally work the other way?

The Mustard Corporation is a company of writers and designers with credits on over 30 published games, writing the original screenplays for, or script editing titles such as *Broken Sword: The Director's Cut*, *Planet 51*, *Just Cause*, and the *Driver* series. They also have experience as voice directors, voice producers, casting producers and motion capture directors, as well as working as writers and producers in TV, radio and cross-media. To top this off they've picked up Writers Guild and BAFTA nominations for Neil Richards' exemplary writing on the *Broken Sword* series.

Nimrod Productions are specialists in music supervision, recording, mixing, production and creating bespoke music compositions for developers. To date, their extremely varied project list of over 90 titles includes the *Driver* series, *Split/Second*, *Far Cry 2*, and *Killzone 2* as well as picking up three Develop Award nominations.

SO, WHY MANA?

Both companies had contributed to voice recording projects in a variety of ways, but neither ever shouldered the full responsibility to the client. With both companies working at the service end of the industry, often for the same developers, it became clear they shared a similar vision of the future and possessed the ideal fit of complementary skills; for Mustard no one knew their way around studio equipment, sound integrity and post production better than Nimrod.

For Nimrod, no one knew their way around scripts, casting and working with actors than Mustard.

Maurice Suckling, of Mustard and Mana explains: "Mustard and Nimrod fell naturally into a union – we had shared experiences, a shared trajectory and were looking in the same direction with each of us missing a specific jigsaw piece. On top of that I've known and enjoyed working with Marc and Rich in some capacity for such a long time it all came very easily. The chances are, the kind of people any prospective alliance needs aren't just out there, but both the parties probably know each other already. We began as partners – working in our respective areas. But we noticed on *Pokémon Battle Revolution*, and then again on *Wii Fit*, that Nintendo needed reassurance and explanation when seeing emails predominantly from Mustard addresses at the start of the project as we cast and handled pre-production, and then predominantly from Nimrod addresses as the project phased into the delivery of the post produced files."

> ***"Mustard and Nimrod fell naturally into a union – we had shared experiences, a shared trajectory and were looking in the same direction."***
>
> Maurice Suckling, Mustard

Marc Canham, of Nimrod and Mana picks up: "There was no question of us abandoning our respective specialisms and businesses, but we did start to wonder if a clear identity for our joint voice-recording work would make things clearer for clients; besides, by that stage Mustard and Nimrod were so comfortable working together it felt like a natural evolution to formalise our partnership. If it works it works, and the level of trust and cohesion that comes from a formal arrangement isn't just a boost to everyone, it helps define your identity and goals – the whole enterprise gets an additional kick out that."

Both Nimrod and Mustard see real advantages in being three, rather than one.

"Mustard and Nimrod still absolutely exist independently of each other", says Sucking. "Nimrod still compose and licence music, and Mustard still write and design. But now there's Mana as well which we jointly own, and, with some shared key personnel, Mana focuses solely on producing high-quality voice recordings.

"The identity of each company is distinct and we're very happy to provide a specialist service in any one of these areas – separately. But should a client have a need for music, script and voice recording to all be outsourced and they see benefits in bringing it all under one umbrella we can respond accordingly."

"Mustard, Nimrod and Mana all bring in trusted support staff as appropriate," adds Canham. "But the key personnel do the heavy lifting, and make the key creative and organisational decisions – we don't work like an agency subcontracting the work out. If you hire us you get us."

All of which means Mustard and Nimrod can specialise across the considerable breadth of their respective and over-lapping areas, while Mana's clients benefit from a unique voice recording service wielding three core strengths.

Firstly, Mana offers a its customers a deep understanding of the high audio standards required within the discipline, thanks to the heritage of its founding organisation.

Secondly, it can leverage practical knowledge of game story, character, dialogue, narrative and design.

Finally, Mana promises the deliver extreme flexibility when answering a to any given client's particular needs.

Mana is the child of an intriguing and distinct alliance. In a changeable and demanding industry, games companies of any stripe need to consistantly produce top-tier results, regardless of the project – fusing the knowledge and experience of two distinct companies has allowed the creation of an impressive third, which has already proven itself capable of doing just that.
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Sound Management

Never mind conducting an orchestra. Stephen Root has to assign audio talent to numerous projects across three prolific studios. **Will Freeman** asks him how he does it…

Above: Stephen Root deploys highly specialised audio teams across the Codemasters portfolio

As Codemasters' director of audio, Stephen Root is faced with the mammoth task of managing the teams currently working on nine projects across three studios. To that end, he and his colleagues have developed a flexible audio resource allocation model that promises to provide the ideal staff for each job. *Develop* spoke with Root to learn more.

Develop: What kind of ecosystem does Codemasters have in place to make sure each project and team gets the right audio talent and tech?

We have a centralised audio department, and at the head of that, with my leads and audio directors, I assign resource to the given projects for certain periods of time. I have to balance my resource pool with the need to ramp up and ramp down on projects, and decide carefully who is needed when.

The way we have set it up, and this is really important, is that we can find the right specialists among the audio designers. We have highly specialised people we can apply to a project that exactly needs what they offer. For example, on the racing side, I have a guy who just works on engine sounds. He is a real specialist in that field.

To get the most out of teams, and the best audio, having these specialists is really essential. So we'll have people that are incredible at front end and flow, or cutscenes, dialogue or atmospherics. The whole approach reaps massive awards.

Below: An open-minded attitude to freelancers has been a great help to the Bodycount project

So you have a team of specialists you can assemble highly tailoured teams from, to give projects just what they need?

Exactly. Pardon the analogy, but it's a little like a Michelin-starred chef. They wouldn't just pop down to Tesco. They'd pick the best butcher, the best grocer, and pick the best of what you need.

What I've tried to do is employ people specifically for their specific skill sets, rather than use all-rounders. That way we get more from their different areas. Having a team you can deploy in this way is key to getting bigger successes out of each project.

> ***A flexible approach also gives the best results because it keeps people fresh. It keeps them on the move, and broadens their experience of their discipline.***
>
> Stephen Root, Codemasters

What makes it all the more important is that we have a range of styles of product. Our method caters for that diversity.

Did you conceive this dynamic team model on day one, or has it evolved over time?

It's been over time, with a lot of conversations with my audio managers and key leads. We've just had to take a good look at what really works, where the bottle necks and project spikes appear, and ask how we best do it and how do we overcome things. You always need more resource, but having a good pool means that I can always work out the best way – with the calendar – to pool them at different times.

This way of doing things also means that you can adapt to the process of a game's development. Maybe the flow and front end wont come until three-quarters of the way through a project's cycle. Wel,I having small 'attack teams' means I can anticipate exactly that and get the best there are there when they're needed.

A flexible approach also gives the best results because it keeps people fresh. It keeps them on the move, and broadens their experience of their discipline.

Sometimes people are on projects from start to end of course, which can be a really good thing, but it's great when people can move around.

How does using tech fit into your strategy? Is your approach largely proprietary or do you opt to use external tools?

At Codemasters we have our own technology – EGO – which covers graphics, audio and many other disciplines. It comes with an implementation toolset, and the engine itself. It's always evolving. We have three dedicated audio programmers on EGO all of the time, who are updating tools and runtimes and moving stuff forward into areas like speech and surround.

However, we're not averse to middleware. We keep an eye on how some of it is coming on. For example Wwise is really gaining some steam, and it's very interesting to see. In the future we might look at other solutions, if they partnered well with what we were doing. Again, it's about flexibility.

Does that flexible approach go as far as being open-minded to using freelancers and outsourcing work?

Well, I'm hiring heavily at the moment, and bringing people in, and we're also working with freelancers on occaision.

For example, I have a brilliant freelancer on contract for the *Bodycount* project down in Guildford. If there were more really good freelancers around, I'd be open-minded to bringing on more. It would be great to get them in, and bringing on contractors can certainly fit with our way of assembling specialised teams. If it fits, and makes for a better product, of course.

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REC Member

Scratching the itch

Getting the world of turntables, bpm and scratching condensed into a fun and exciting social gaming experience was no easy task, but FreeStyleGames managed it with aplomb in DJ Hero. The studio's head of music Dan Neil talks to **Develop** about managing the mix…

The creation of *DJ Hero* has been a history of mixing together the seemingly unrelated worlds of DJing and video game development. This process has generally produced a harmonious blend, but sometimes the familiar thud of two records slipping out of sync. After many broken record needles, scratched vinyl and late nights fuelled by energy drinks, we reckon we've cracked it. Here's a quick rewind through the history of how the music for *DJ Hero* came about.

SWITCHING ON THE TURNTABLE

DJing and Hip-Hop has always been a passion for FreeStyleGames and so after the 2006 release of our break-dancing game, *B-Boy*, a DJing title seemed like the logical next step. There had been pure button-tapping, rhythm-action games like *Beatmania* before, but we wanted to make a different game. We wanted to capture the heart of what DJing is about; cross-fading, scratching, remixing and DSP effects. A game where just like a DJ, the player gets to manipulate and play around with classic records.

We've also always been crazy about mash-ups, and they seemed like a great basis for a video game, with their balance of the familiar and fresh, and the fun in blending two records together – the music and vocals playing off each other to create new genres, melodies and lyrics.

However, simple mash-ups weren't quite right for a DJing game. A smooth blend of two songs doesn't include the DJ performance element required to provide the exciting interaction of a game, so we needed to build a team who could create the action-filled music the title would need.

PUT THE NEEDLE ON THE RECORD

We pulled together the best talent from the various musical worlds that we wanted to collide. We brought together mash-up DJs, DMC scratch champions and glitch-edit remixers with the aim of blending scratching, live DJ techniques and mash-up musical aesthetics. We put them in a studio in the east end of London for a few months, and watched what happened.

Exciting mixes with the musical selection and sensibilities of mash-ups started to emerge. This was a sonic style and reproduction of DJing that we were able to build game mechanics around – an interface, and a controller.

Music was driving the shape of the game.

MIXES ARE GAMEPLAY

Our next key breakthrough was an understanding of the extent to which we'd have to learn to craft the mixes to meet the needs of the game. When Metallica wrote *Enter Sandman*, the way that the guitar riff might look if translated into dots sliding down a TV screen wouldn't have been a major consideration. The game-play in *Guitar Hero* is driven by the development team choosing songs with great guitar lines, and then finding a compelling visual notation for them.

> ***"Simple mash-ups weren't right for a DJ game. A smooth blend of two songs doesn't include the DJ performance element required to provide the exciting interaction of a game."***

The game-play in *DJ Hero* is the scratching, the edits, the samples and the interaction of the two records. Every game-play action had to be first crafted musically, and so the DJs weren't just creating mash-ups full of clever audio manipulations, they were entering into the world of video game level design. Now the two records slip a little out of time.

Making mixes that feel completely connected to the player, are at the correct difficulty for the career mode progression, have fun and unique game-play without compromising the flow of the music, and are musically strong enough to be approved by artists who have never approved a mash-up before, proved difficult. Very, very difficult.

The mixes were being created and notated in two different worlds. DJs made the mixes and game developers notated them and integrated them into the game. Communicating and balancing the complex requirements of both the gameplay and music at times seemed impossible.

The breakthrough came when we understood and embraced the dual nature of the DJ's role. With lots of help from the design team, the DJs took on this role, and learned to notate their own mixes for the game. The music informs the gameplay, but crucially it was able to feed back into the music creation process in real-time, so that the music could be shaped to play as we wanted. We'd closed the loop between music and gameplay. The edits, scratches and musical choices were now being heard in real-time, but also played in-real time on the controller, and the music morphed and twisted by the DJs to make the best game.

BUILDING A DJ ARMY

With the support of Activision, we were able to build a dedicated facility in London purely for the creation of *DJ Hero* mixes.

Internally, and with our wider network of external music producers, *DJ Hero* now pulls in music from over 50 contributors, from unknown but hugely talented producers, right through to massive names like Tiësto & DJ Shadow. All of the DJs working on *DJ Hero* had to grasp the duality of their role, using their own musical skills to explore new ways of driving the player interactions and game-play.

PLAYING OUT

We were amazed by the reaction to the music of *DJ Hero*. Winning the Develop Award for Audio Accomplishment, the Spike award for Best Soundtrack, and being BAFTA nominated for Use Of Audio was a massive honour.

We've just completed our second album with *DJ Hero 2*, and can't wait to see the reaction to the mixes that the DJ team have cooked up this time.

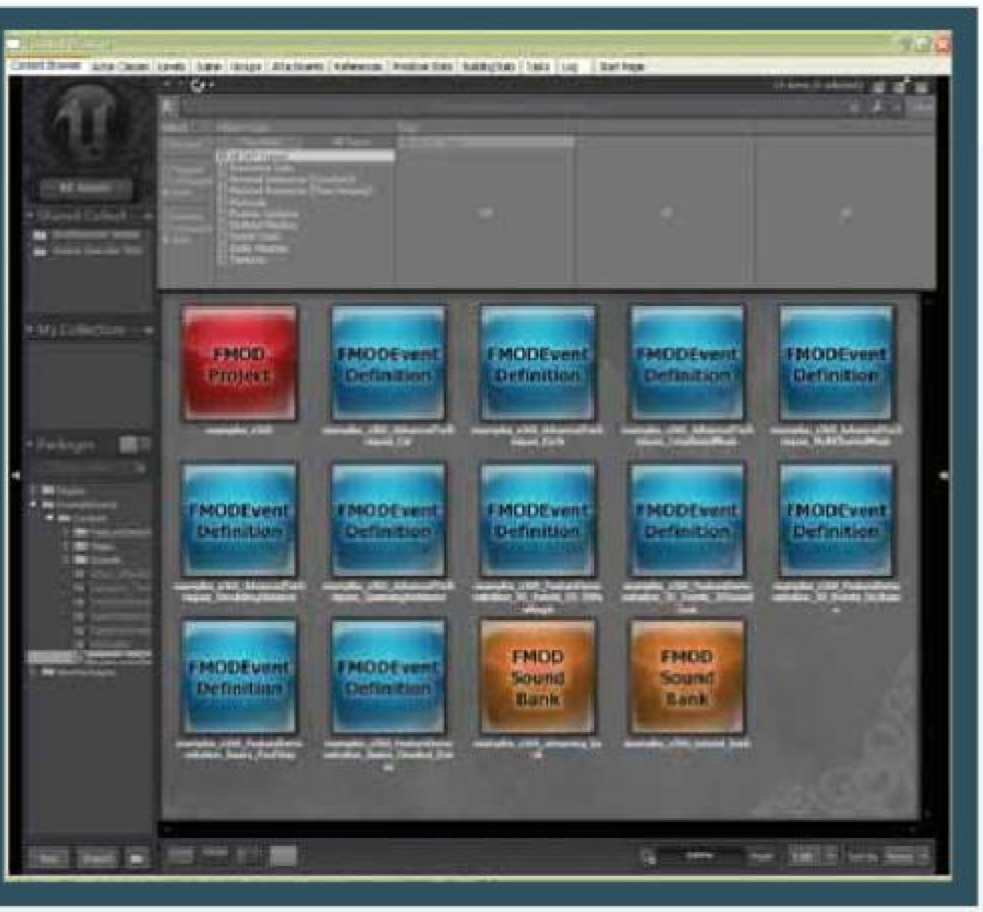
www.freestylegames.com

Above: Dan Neil, head of music at FreeSytleGames

Below: Members of the FreeStyleGames team developing DJ Hero

Never tear us part

After hearing that their customers were struggling to use their audio tech with UE3, FMOD made some dramatic changes to its kit. FMOD Sales and Business Manager **Martin Wilkes** talks to Develop about the complex path to customer satisfaction…



At GameSoundCon last year we heard the message that a lot of people are using Unreal Engine 3 and a lot of people are using FMOD Designer – but that they don't work together. We listened to long-time FMOD users who were struggling with Unreal's built-in audio system and wishing that they could use FMOD Designer on their Unreal projects so they could do all the cool things that FMOD enables.

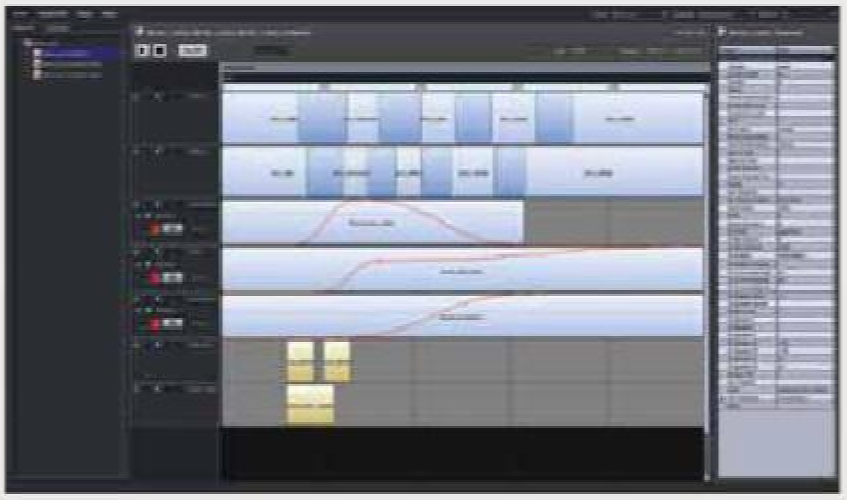
So, we set about making an integration between FMOD and Unreal. Essentially, that means we've written a bunch of code that you can download that makes Unreal use FMOD as its sound engine. This provides some really cool features that then allow you to leverage the power of FMOD from within your Unreal game.

HORSE POWER

The power of FMOD stems largely from its low-level FMOD Ex engine. This is the heart of FMOD; the thing that's hidden away behind the scenes in so many games these days. The first thing we did was replace Unreal's built-in audio engine with FMOD Ex. We didn't make FMOD run side-by-side with Unreal's built-in audio engine – we just completely replaced it. This means that you can still use Unreal's 'sound cues' etc. but, under the hood, it'll actually be using FMOD.

The other major part of FMOD is the Event System. This is what plays back the events that you create with the FMOD Designer tool. It is built on top of FMOD Ex. We added the code to Unreal so that you are able to work with the FMOD Event System using UnrealScript. We exposed all of the features of FMOD's events, event parameters, categories and interactive music cues so that they can be used by UnrealScript and its programmers can write UnrealScript to work well with all these things. That leaves the coders feeling happy, but what about the sound designers?

Below: FMOD in action



> ***The power of FMOD stems largely from its low-level FMOD Ex engine. This is the heart of FMOD; the thing that's hidden behind the scenes.***
>
> Martin Wilkes, FMOD

The next step was to hook FMOD into the Unreal editor so you could use and manipulate FMOD objects without having to write any code at all. We covered everything from actors to visual scripting, allowing complete control of the playback of FMOD generated content.

One limitation of Unreal's built-in audio engine is that it can't play streaming audio direct from disk. Streaming audio is FMOD's bread and butter so, of course, we implemented it into Unreal. Rather than just tacking our streaming engine on the side of Unreal, we decided to go for a truly integrated solution and route all of our streaming through Unreal's streaming I/O system. This means that it plays nicely with the rest of the game and that programmers can manage audio streaming the same way they manage any other streaming; only one system to think about.

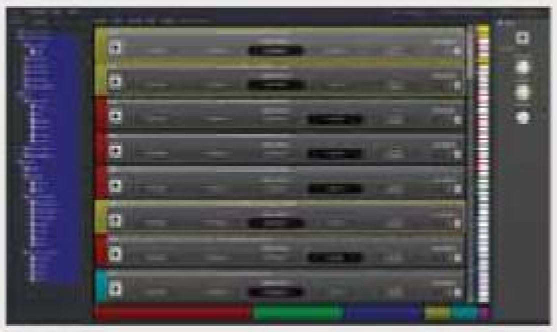
FMOD Designer is a sound design tool for creating game audio. It's the user-friendly, 'sound guy' front end of FMOD where sound designers can prototype, create and profile game audio without the need for programmer interaction. If FMOD Ex is the engine under the hood, FMOD Designer is very much the sexy, sleek body around it – it drives the game audio, and it's where all the creativity and experience and mad chops come into play. By making it possible to use FMOD Designer with Unreal, we wanted to enable sound designers to use all their professional audio skills and experience to actually make game audio.

For example, designers can work in a familiar multi-track environment within FMOD Designer to create truly dynamic sound effects. They can use familiar tools such as effects and automation to make sound effects react to what's happening in the game.

EASY DOES IT

Mixing game audio is also made easy by FMOD Designer. Rather than tweaking individual sounds in the UE3 editor, you can use FMOD Designer's bulk editor to survey and tweak the volumes for all sounds in the game using mixer-like fader controls.

Well, that's how we've tackled the problem of using FMOD Designer with Unreal. Hopefully we've gone some way towards making FMOD Designer a tool that can be used regardless of the game engine you're working with. Ideally, we'd like to provide similar integrations with all the popular game engines – we already support CryENGINE, Unity, Vision, Torque and BigWorld in addition to Unreal – because, frankly, sound designers shouldn't be forced to use a particular audio tool just because the graphics guys chose the wrong game engine.
www.fmod.org



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Ian Livingstone, I presume?

Multimedia composer Ian Livingstone has been creating audio for the games industry since 1994. **Stuart Richardson** caught up with him to talk about working on such standout scores as Napoleon: Total War and Battlefield: 1943…

Ian Livingstone is a name synonymous with the games industry. That it perhaps brings to most people's minds someone other than the man behind music scores for titles like Codemasters' upcoming *F1-2010* and Relic's *Company of Heroes: Opposing Fronts* is a fact not lost that Ian Livingstone.

It is also unlikely to be something that keeps him awake at night. With a long list of top quality work to his name, that Ian Livingstone is an established and respected entity in game music.

When *Develop* sat down with him, we were keen to find out about the path that got him to where he is today.

How did you get started in composing for games?

After taking a degree in music in the early '90s at Salford University I became involved in various areas of music production, ranging from in-house sound engineer to touring Europe as session musician with a couple of signed bands. Then purely by chance – an equipment sale to a guy via local free-ads paper *Loot* – I became introduced to a local developer Warthog and ended up composing for about five of their early projects including Microsoft's *Starlancer*. I've since scored over 100 titles.

What titles are you working on at the moment?

I've just finished *F1 2010* for Codemasters – this was actually my second F1 title as I worked on another in the late 90s. But time around we took a more cinematic approach – it's a mixture of traditional electronic tech mixed with big thematic rousing strings – which I recorded live at Abbey Road. It's fairly heroic but not in an 'epic horns' gladiatorial kind of way, but more classy lush rich and expensive approach.

I'm also just finishing off on *Create* for Electronic Arts which is a complete contrast – it's aimed at a much younger audience and the music is completely adaptive. The audio team are working in wWise and we've really gone to town on the number of layers with the way the intensity builds depending on how complex the world you're building becomes. For that one the number of genres is huge – ranging from spooky gothic, '50s sci-fi, hip-hop, '80s synth pop, swashbuckling action, fairground, Chinese and Japanese ethnic flavours, etc. I've been lucky enough to work with some world-class session musicians and the whole project has just been a total blast going to town within all of those styles.

> ***"I'm always pushing games developers to take the plunge and work with as many live players as possible. Even if it's just a soloist or small string section, it can make such a difference."***

How does recording an orchestra at Abbey Road compare to it in Eastern Europe?

Cost-wise the difference isn't as big as it used to be, with current exchange rates. I've recorded in Moscow, Bratislava, most recently on additional music for *Napoleon: Total War*; in Prague for *Company Of Heroes: Opposing Fronts*, and in London recently with *F1* and also *Battlefield 1943* at Abbey Road. There are some fantastic musicians in Eastern Europe but the quality of the instruments can sometimes let them down, and although the sessions in UK are shorter, the players over here are red-hot and can sight incredibly complex music in just one take. I've had problems sometimes in the past with brass in Eastern Europe too and the tuning at 442 instead of 440 can cause nightmares.

How do you realise your scores from initial demos to final production?

I'm always pushing games developers to take the plunge and work with as many live players as possible. Even if it's just a soloist or small string section, it can make such a difference to the emotion of a score.

However not every project has the time or budget to record full orchestra. I'm totally passionate about making my midi mock-ups sound as real as possible – to the point that I recorded my own custom sampling library together with a small bunch of other media composers in Utah.

We were frustrated by the sterility of perfectly in-tune and noise reduced commercial libraries available at the time so shared the cost and editing time - and I'm still constantly re-programming it to this day. Elaborate midi mock-ups are a vital part of the process for both games and film – I was hired last year to produce the midi mock-ups for the *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince* movie prior to recording at Abbey Road, so the director and producers could hear a very good approximation of how it would sound before they recorded a single note.

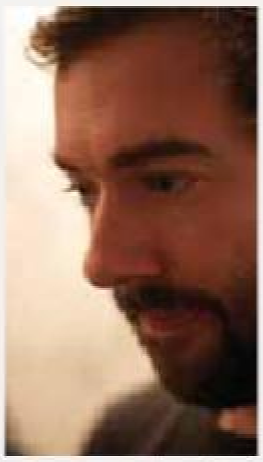
So in that instance the mock-ups were part of the pre-production process rather than end-result, although often if the budget just isn't available to record everything live it's obviously always good to have as close as possible to the real thing.

www.ianlivingstone.net

Above: Ian Livingstone at his workstation

Hearing aid

Your eyes do not decieve you, and it isn't switched off. That's an iPhone running audio-only title Papa Sangre. **Will Freeman** took a trip to Somethin' Else to hear how it works…



Above: Somethin' Else's head of development Ben Cave listens to something interesting

Playing *Papa Sangre* is a quite incredible experience. The Somethin' Else developed iPhone game whisks players away to a playfully sinister world based largely on the Festival of the dead.

What makes the game stand out is its graphical style.

To be fair, that's a slightly misleading statement. *Papa Sangre* features almost no visuals at all.

It is a game made entirely of sound. That might not be a first – there's been commercial releases like GBA curio *Sound Voyager* that toy with the notion of scrapping graphics before. However, *Papa Sangre* does something truly special, in that it builds a rich, sometimes scary 3D world entirely in sound, which the player can move through and explore.

The development is being led by London production company Somethin' Else, with input from a clique of luminaries including designer and consultant Margaret Robinson, coder Adam Hoyle, audio computer artist Dan Jones, sound designer and binaural audio specialist Nick Ryan, and Tassos Stevens, Coney's gaming theater visionary.

SONIC BOOM

The game consists of levels in which the player must evade capture and solve puzzels to save the sole of somebody lost in the land of the dead.

The problems for those creating *Papa Sangre* has been tackling an entirely new development technique. Just how do you build a playable game made from sound, when designers instinctively think visually?

Somethin' Else's head of development Ben Cave starts to explain the problem he and his colleagues faced with a perfect, – if rather gruesome – example: "We had ideas like babies hanging from trees, but how do you soniphy a baby hanging from a tree? We inevitably started creating quite a lot of levels that had to have loads of NPC chat at the front to set up the kinds of sounds the player was going to hear, instead of having sounds that actually speak for themselves."

> ***"We had ideas like babies hanging from trees, but how do you soniphy a baby hanging from a tree? We inevitably created levels with loads of NPC chat."***
>
> Ben Cave, Somethin' Else

But, says Cave, his team wanted to create sounds that stimulated the imagination without the need of too much narration. Having set itself the challenge of soniphying a world that requires no explanation, the team granted level names that gave the player enough of a starting point. 'Ring of Fire' makes for a perfect example.

Of course, that doesn't mean shaking free the conventions of traditional game design wasn't still a problem.

"We started with lots of corridors and caverns," explains Cave, "but through play testing we realised that people can't understand the shapes of rooms sonically at all, and got very annoyed walking into walls. We found that it was better to have very big square spaces where the player starts in the middle, with very few barriers."

There were other challenges too. A sense of scale was achieved by 'cartoonising' the audio physics, doing things like playing with the length of a players gate as a pursuing monster draws closer.

SOUNDS LIKE FUN

From a technological viewpoint, *Papa Sangre* is built largely from a binaural sound design perspective, as Cave explains.

"We have three types of sound in our game. There's stereo sound, which you hear like any other game. Then there's what we're calling baked binaural sound, which is effectively recorded using a microphone in the shape of a human head, called a Neumann KE 100. It has two microphones inside the ears, and literally looks like a human head.

The highly specialised KE 100 models the way that the brain responds to the direction of sounds around the player's head, and the results are quite remarkable.

"Finally we have the computationally rendered binaural sound as well," confirms Cave. "That's effectively saying we have 10,000 audio files in the game, and we have to decide where they are positioned. The way that this is achieved is by using something called HRTF, which stands for Head Related Transfer Function.

"They are generated externally by other companies, in an anacote chamber, where you put a dummy head in the middle of the room, and have thousands of speakers at every different possible elevation and angle, and you fire sounds at the dummy head. That registers the attenuations in volume and EQ from every possible direction, and turns that into data that is what they call HRTF. That HRTF forms the basis of our later processing in-game."

At that point, Somethin' Else take the HRTF, and port it to the iPhone using their own code, by way of using a selection of open source technologies.

The result is very impressive and scary. It's hard to believe Somethin' Else isn't a dedicated games developer.

www.somethinelse.com

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All systems GO

Can a publisher really empathise with what a developer needs? System 3 thinks so. **Will Freeman** caught up with CEO Mark Cale to find out more…

Developers have taught themselves to be wary of publishers. Subsequently, the men in suits that turn a studio's creative projects into capital are often greeted with some very cynical glances, and that's if they are lucky.

It doesn't matter if it is the system so many developers bemoan that affords them the luxury of biting the hand that feeds; publishers are frequently posed as the industry's bad guys.

And then you meet System 3's Mark Cale; the CEO at the helm of a UK publisher with almost 28 years in the business behind it. Cale is a man with a furious energy for the games industry; a publisher who clearly cares very deeply about games, and who isn't afraid to talk some tough truths about the industry's shortcomings.

Cale might well be a suited publisher, but he is also the kind of executive who can enthuse for twenty minutes on the majesty of a particular boss fight in a classic arcade title, or talk with passion about a developer's elegant emulation of his favourite pinball table's ROM chipset, even if those conversations mean missing his lunch.

System 3, which is currently defying all known conventions with an initiative that sees a wealth of current and forthcoming releases recieve near simultaneous launches on both digital and physical platforms, is a company that has never shied away from releasing more hardcore, 'gamer's games'.

Below: System 3's Putty Squad on the iPad

KARATE KIDS

While the firm can lay claim to the PS2's first true budget range, and has long ties with the history of the casual movement, it is also the company that chose to bring the likes of *Silent Bomber* and *Guilty Gear* to market in the UK. System 3 has experience in developing too, having created the iconic *International Karate* series back in 1985.

> ***"I believe we are one of the few companies that give that input and feedback to the developer at that level. Most of our partners agree."***
>
> Mark Cale, System 3

Undeniably then, System 3 has a heritage with all the right credentials, but then so do some of the publishers that arch the backs of even the most affable studios. The difference is, says Cale, that System 3 understands developers, and isn't afraid to get involved at the creative source. That's something else we've all heard before, but when it comes from a man like Cale, who rarely sugar-coats his words with PR-spin, it seems a great deal more sincere.

"We offer something unique that a lot of other publishers seem to have forgotten, and that is that we offer the ability to help people that have great technology, and need to translate that technology into playable games," says Cale.

System 3's working methodology is one that sees it getting involved with a development studio at the very inception of a new idea, meaning it can call on all of its development experience to help the studio at a level atypical of that which most external publishers offer.

"We're always involved intimately with the creative process, and we will not accept anything that does not join with our belief," confirms Cale. "Of course, there are always areas in any product where things could be done better, and time prevails as an issue.

"We realise that. There are limitations to the hardware and technology and tools at hand to the developer you work with. There are restrictions that stop you from pushing something all the way, but we always believe that we have to be involved right from the start through to the end to get the best possible experience out of the tools and the technology and the teams. I think that's a very important difference in what we do."

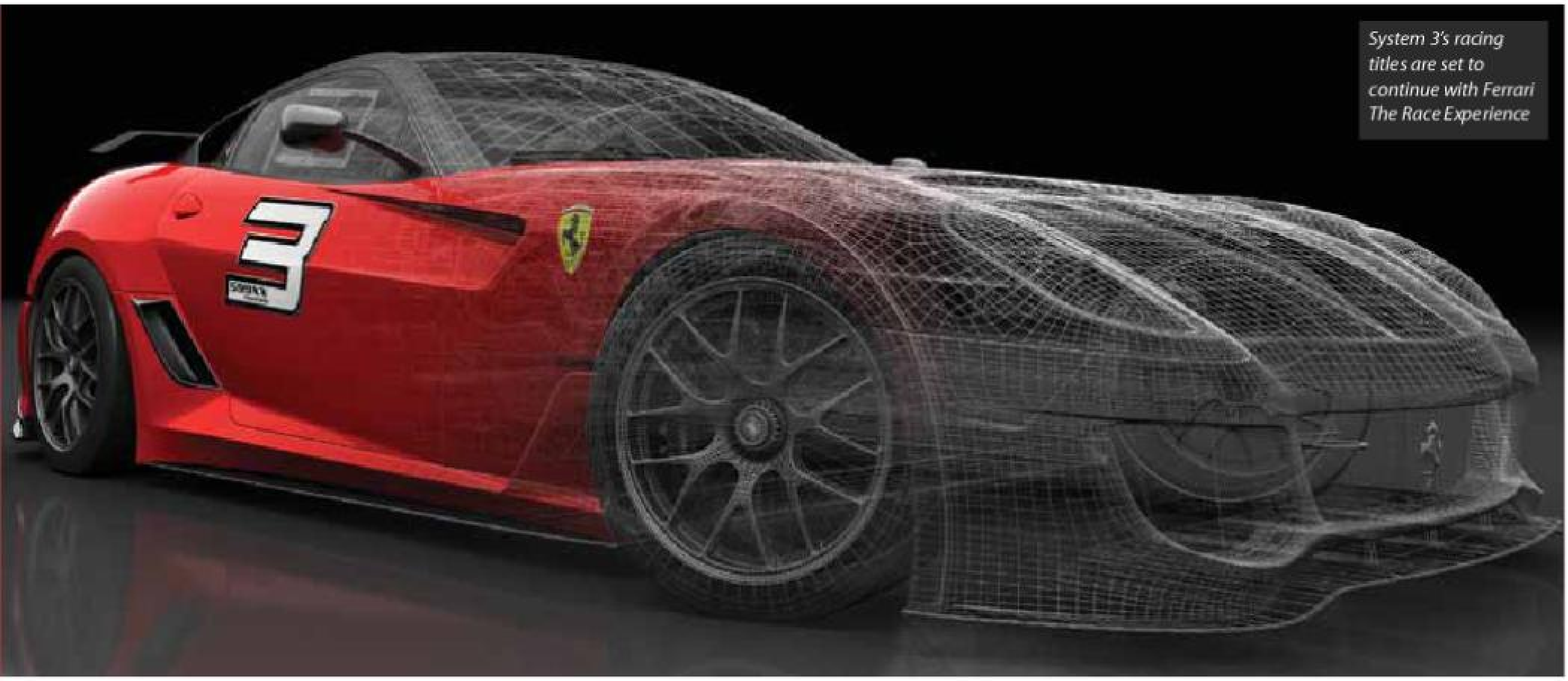
A case in point would be System 3's work with driving game specialist Eutechnyx, which has developed the publisher's flagship racing series that has just reached its third instalment with *Ferrari: The Race Experience.*

"If you look at Eutechnyx prior to when we started working with them on *Ferrari Challenge* on the PS3, they started of life as Zeppelin Games and have had a number of hits in their time, and I don't want to be disrespectful to their talent or the history they have had in the industry," says Cale.

"Prior to starting on *Ferrari Challenge*, and fundamentally at that particular point in time, they had some of the best racing engine technology going, but they had failed to exploit that well and make great products. Their products were things like *Pimp My Ride* and *The Fast and the Furious.*"

At that point, System 3 will work with the creative team and technology to better realise its vision of a company's game, building a framework around existing technology. It's a relatively distinct approach, and one Cale and his colleagues are proud of.

"I believe we are one of the few companies that give that input and feedback to the developer at that level, and most of the developers we have worked with have always said that is one of the big assets System 3 offers," states the CEO. "We care about the



System 3's racing titles are set to continue with Ferrari The Race Experience

product, we care about the teams, we support them, and we try to make their good products into great products."

OUTSIDE THE TICK-BOX

Cale isn't afraid to criticise the conventional publishing model either. While System 3 has specialised in helping developers realise the potential of their tech, according to Cale, the traditional publishing model is still struggling to rid itself of an unhealthy obsession with a studio's technological arsenal over the merits of any title in question.

"There does seem to be a hang up with a lot of publishers that there needs to be certain things; a tick-box approach if you like. They think studios have to be using certain technology and software; they feel people have to have a certain number of people and be doing certain things, or they can't do a project," says Cale.

"We don't think that. We look at how good a team is, and firstly look at if they have the ability to listen to ideas to be more creative. Secondly, we ask 'do they have the available technology?'. That's not in terms of hardware; it's about their routines being good enough for them to produce what they want to do. We don't look at the actual machinery on their desks and the size of their team; it's about the technology along with the drive and the passion."

Cale certainly has the experience to offer that service. He can remember receiving orders for games via telex, and talks fondly of the time when the arrival of the fax machine felt like it had the potential to revolutionise the pace of the industry.

He's also a man whose ambition hasn't suffered as a result of years weathering the storm of tougher periods. In fact, Cale has set himself something of an opus.

"My heart is honestly focused on making the perfect game," reveals the CEO. "There's no such thing of course, because by the time you've got something done, something new is emerging that can beat where you're at, and there's someone else trying to do better, but that's what you have to do. It's a race against time, and things are always changing and technology is always evolving, and I really enjoy that side of the industry. And I also really enjoy playing the games. Playing the games and trying to help developers make the best play experience is really important to what a publisher should do. It's a passion of mine. I want to play everything that comes out."

> **"*There does seem to be a hang up with a lot of publishers that there needs to be certain things; a tick-box approach if you like. We don't think like that.*"**
>
> Mark Cale, System 3

Give Cale five minutes of your time, and within 60 seconds, you'll be in little doubt that he's being absolutely sincere. He isn't afraid to serve as one of gaming's harshest critics, but that, it seems, is his duty as a man besotted by the medium and its industry.

With *Ferrari: The Race Experience*, *Putty Squad*, *Super Fruitfall Deluxe*, *Williams Pinball Classics* and a wealth of other titles set to leave the System 3 stable on a diverse range of platforms both digital and physical this month, it's been a busy time for the publisher, and based on the past 28 years, that trend is set to continue.

www.system3.com

THE TALE OF THE FORTY THIEVES

Above: the upcoming Williams Pinball Classics

Who Dares Wins

Last month Develop attended Dare to be Digital's ProtoPlay event as a judge. Having returned from Edinburgh **Will Freeman** looks at what the initive has achieved…

Above: Sculpty, one of the winning Protoplay titles

Below: The ProtoPlay audience engrossed in a game prototype

Walking the show floor at last month's Dare to be Digital ProtoPlay event in Edinburgh, it was hard not to warm to the atmosphere of what has become an increasingly important showcase for grass roots video games development and the potential of raw talent.

The ProtoPlay event is focused around the final stage of the main Dare to be Digital development competition, which gives 15 hand-picked student teams the chance to make a working game prototype in 10 short weeks, from scratch, with help from a select number of industry veterans. Hosted in the midst of the creative chaos that is the Edinburgh Festival, ProtoPlay sees the internationally sourced teams, who are youthful, enthusiastic and – in the best possible sense of the word – somewhat unrefined, unleash their finished projects on the world.

A panel of industry judges from the likes of Ubisoft, Rockstar, Codemasters, the BBC and the good people at *Develop* then spend time with the games and their creators, as do hordes of the public in attendance, before three winning teams are selected to become the sole nominees for the 2011 BAFTA Ones To Watch Award at the forthcoming British Academy Video Game Awards in London.

Beyond the ongoing process of the competition itself, Dare's organisers are clear in their goals.

"Dare is about talent spotting," confirms Paul Durrant, director of business development of Abertay University, which organises the event. "Abertay University works with the industry and our sponsors to create a platform to look for talented students, offering them a once-in-a-life-time opportunity to get real-life working experience before they enter the workforce. We aim to help supply industry-ready talent to the development industry and to encourage entrepreneurism."

It's an admirable proposition, but what is most immediately encouraging about the event is its lack of pretention. Glancing at the bustling show floor, it could easily be a hall at Gamescom, but peer more intently, and it's apparent that teams of eager public are not gathered at a rolling demo of the latest generic triple-A release, or queuing for hours to play two-minutes of a licensed sequel.

> ***Abertay University works with the industry to create a platform to look for talented students, offering them a once-in-a-lifetime oppprtunity.***
>
> Paul Durrant, ProtoPlay

It's noticeably loud too, and not from the white noise of speakers spluttering marketing spiel. It's laughter that fills the air. The public in attendance at ProtoPlay is young, raucous and delighted.

They are hungrily digesting fresh cuts of creativity, without a thought for the games that usually vie for their attention from the shelves of high street stores. It may not be rock 'n' roll, but it's a lot more like seeing an arm-flailing crowd enthralled at a energetic gig in a garage than a middle-aged audience comfortably seated for The Rolling Stones' umpteenth comeback tour.

In fact, a publically playable Kinect kit is on the show floor, but it's doing little to deter players from their fervent consumption of the output of Dare's indie role call.

WHAT THEY DID LAST SUMMER

Just this summer, the 15 students from the trio of winning teams were among thousands who were taking a break from their university studies. Post-ProtoPlay, they are a BAFTA award nominees. And more than that, they are now experienced in the reality of games development under the pressure of a meaningful deadline.

"They have a game prototype on their portfolio, which has been tested and approved by influential games companies," says Durrant. "The 10 weeks transformed their life and for sure it will make a great impact in their career when they leave university in a year or so's time."

It's not just the organisers who speak highly of Dare's merits either. Jocce Marklund is a programmer and designer at That Game Studio, which created *Twang*, securing it a place as one of ProtoPlay's trio of victors.

"During the whole competition we've got mentors visiting us and giving us feedback on our game and our team," states Marklund. "They have provided fresh eyes on the game and pointed out things that led to improvements in the game that we would otherwise have not even thought of. Other than that, the people working with Dare made it easier for us to focus on the development instead of spending time with hardware/software and travel arrangements and such."

Side-scrolling platform racer *Twang* stood out at the event as one of the most polished games, and in many ways captured the spirit of what this kind of gathering is about. It was a neat, simple idea that gripped the attention of the crowds and judges alike, and offered a glimpse of something far bigger that wasn't hard to imagine as a hit on Xbox Live.

That Game Studio has every right to feel proud, as do the other main winners, Angry Mango, which impressed with its Zune

Above: That Game Studio members take to the stage to accept their award

platformer *Mush*, which demonstrated a staggering level of artistic flair, and Team Tickle, which encouraged some of the most tactile interaction yet realised on the Apple table with its iPad romp *Scultpy*.

"Winning this competition means a lot for the team in terms of recognition for our hard work," reveals Marklund. "It shows people that we can in fact make fun games that gamers and non-gamers can enjoy. The sacrifice of leaving all our friends and families behind in Sweden has paid off because we got the experience of not only making a game, but also visiting Scotland and having a lot of people playing our game."

GLOBAL GATHERING

The creators of *Sculpty* weren't the only visitors from overseas either. ProtoPlay did play host to several teams from the UK, but others from Ireland, India, China and America brought a cultural variety apparent not only in the games on display, but in the marketing materials and identities each team had created.

"It's exciting to see so many talented UK students who have the creative minds and the technical capability to execute games which have a strong appeal to the public," says Durrant. "It's equally valuable to see talent from other countries, and they learn from each other. Can games cross cultural boundaries? You seem to see this is possible at Dare ProtoPlay."

Established 11 years ago, ProtoPlay also invites established developers to attend, meaning that along with the main booth space reserved for the indie teams, the likes of Rare, Blitz and Sony have a presence of the show. It of course provides an opportunity to show off new product to an open-minded consumer, but where Dare really distinguishes itself is in inviting studios to integrate themselves with the competition's entire process.

"We invite established game developers to join our Developer Accord, which offers mentoring support to the teams during the 10 weeks," explains Durrant. "This is beneficial to the teams but also helps the companies spot talent."

Talent is certainly on display in abundance, and it's clear from the flurry of business cards that pass hands that for many in attendance, the opportunity to meet feldgling developers first hand is an opportunity relished.

"The competition benefits all partners involved: universities, students, games companies, technology partners and our sponsors," insists Durrant.

> ***"If there are any game development students reading this, apply to Dare to be Digital if you haven't done so already. It is a great way to get valuable experience."***
>
> Jocce Marklund, Dare contestant

Of course, an initiative like Dare is not without its challenges, and in these more frugal times, those hurdles can become significant obstacles.

"The biggest challenge we have is funding," admits Durrant. "In order to ensure the students focus on the competition and do not have the need to look for a summer job, we pay every student £1,700 plus accommodation and transportation in Dundee, as well as in Edinburgh during the Fringe Festival high season.

"Running Dare ProtoPlay professionally to give the public an enjoyable time also costs. We continually look for sponsorship and revenue streams to fund the project. Without continued funding support, there's a risk that the project may need to be discontinued."

To dwell on the negative is unjust though. While the size of the challenge may define its success, Dare to be Digital is a hugely positive asset that has the potential to benefit the entire industry. It has been recognised as a model of best practice by many who take part, and continues to benefit Abertay University in numerous ways.

As well as informing the course design of the institute's renowned games education offering, the workplace simulation model that underpins Dare is being embedded in all other disciplines in the University.

"There is a huge opportunity for this type of project to be used as a way of stimulating significant industry/university collaboration. In comparison to placements and internships, workplace simulation brings a consistent experience across whole cohorts of students from multiple disciplines," says Durrant.

The final word must go to Marklund, who has some advice for those considering a career in games: "If there are any game development students reading this, apply to Dare to be Digital if you haven't done so already. It is a great way to get valuable development experience that is recognised throughout the industry."

Having left the event a winner, the That Game Studio designer is likely especially enthused about the potential of Dare, but his story is one that proves his point. Dare can do very good things for those who enter.

And who knows? In a few months, Marklund could be on stage in front of the industry's finest with the cool metal BAFTA gong in his hands.

www.daretobedigital.com

Below: Focus teasting has perhaps never been practiced better than that at ProtoPlay

FREE is not a business model

It is something very different, and that's no bad thing, suggests **Nicholas Lovell**...

The movement towards free seems unstoppable. iPhone games prices are trending towards zero, mainstream MMOs are going free in droves and Facebook offers a platform for games to play forever without, in many cases, spending a cent.

Yet, many developers look at free and say "That's not a business model." And you know what? They are 100 per cent right.

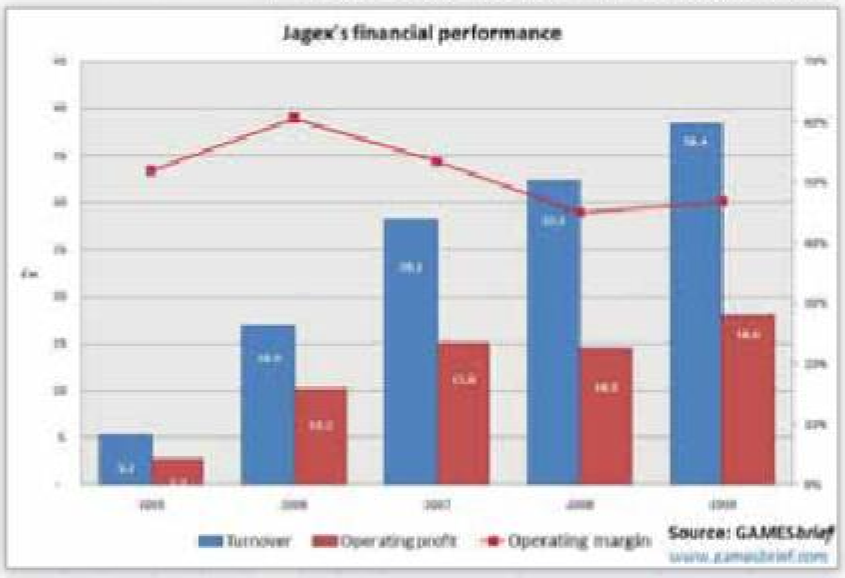
Free is not a business model. It is a way of reducing barriers to entry and getting more users into your game. It is, in short, a marketing tool.

Free is a marketing technique.

The games industry has had some elements of free as part of the marketing mix for a very long time. We are used to playable demos for boxed products, distributed on cover mounts or via the web. The casual industry operated a model of offering a one-hour trial for the games. MMOs used to offer a one-month free-trial before the paywall came crashing down. None of these are free.

Free is about offering your players the opportunity to play your game forever without paying a cent. It is about changing expectations. It involves changing your marketing strategy, your gameplay, your revenue generation and your attitude. It requires dramatic rethinking.

The massive advantage that free offers to developers and publishers is that it reduces the barrier to entry for consumers. Instead of a gamer having to decide to spend £40 on a boxed product, they can check out the game on a whim. In the case of a browser-based game, they can be in and playing in seconds, experiencing your superb content and hopefully enjoying it so much that they keep coming back for more. Each time they come back, you have another opportunity to sell to them. And the good news is that you didn't need a huge marketing budget to get them.



Source: GAMESbrief
www.gamesbrief.com

Bear with me. Marketing costs for free games are rising rapidly, but it is a fundamentally different type of marketing. I hope by the end of this article, I'll have convinced you of the merits of free-style marketing spend.

REAPING THE BENEFITS

What is the biggest benefit of free?

For a developer or publisher, the biggest advantage of free is that it reduces upfront marketing costs. To explain this, let's look at two different examples.

A traditional boxed game costs, say, £40 and generates £20 to the publisher after the retailer and taxman has taken his cut. We all know about the short shelf-lives and need for big marketing push for the opening weekend of a game, so most publishers spend the same amount on marketing as they spent on development.

For *Modern Warfare 2*, the most successful game of 2009, Activision spent $50 million on development and $200 million on marketing, manufacturing and distribution.

That's a huge upfront investment. In contrast, let's look at a free game. You spend, maybe, $1 million on launch development. Then you need to spend money on marketing. And this is where the huge advantage of free over the marketing techniques of traditional publishing becomes apparent. You know which bits of marketing are working for you.

American merchant John Wanamaker is reputed to have said: "Half the money I spend on advertising is wasted; the trouble is I don't know which half." This lack of knowledge leads companies to spend vast sums on blanket coverage in the hope that some of it persuades consumers to part with cash.

The internet has destroyed this paradigm. With better tracking and click-based advertising, we know which advertising works and which doesn't. And that means that we can turn on the marketing taps only when we need it.

So we launch with a small advertising budget. A few hundred pounds or less. We put them on Facebook ads and Google Adsense and some banners that we can track. We see which ads convert well. We tweak and test and iterate. And when we determine a formula which lets us make a higher lifetime value from a customer than it costs us to acquire them, we throw as much money as we possibly can at advertising.

Because at this point, we know that we'll be making money hand over fist. This is exactly what Zynga does, which is why they are the fastest growing games company on the planet right now.

The key is that the initial upfront capital is less. Much, much less. Not only is the game design iterative, so is the marketing.

Should Activision go free? I don't think it makes sense for everyone to go free. In the case of Activision, they have deeper pockets than almost everyone else. Their ability to outspend everyone else on marketing is a competitive advantage. I'm sure this fact has not escaped Bobby Kotick's notice.

Similarly, if you are making games for PSN/XBLA, you may feel that you have an audience of gamers who are accustomed to spending lots of money on games, and should charge them as much as they can bear. And for as long as PSN and XBLA are closed platforms, this might work. But it will drive upfront marketing budgets up as the market becomes more crowded, making life tougher for smaller developers to break into the market.

FREE'S SPIRIT

If the increased capital efficiency is not enough of a reason for you to prefer free, here's five more:

- Free is a gift from you to the consumer, which engenders a feeling of reciprocity: the need for the gamer to pay you back
- Free is hard to pirate
- Free isn't time limited, so you get multiple chances at conversion, and advertising, and lead generation, and virality
- If you're not free, you're competing with lots of games that are
- Free makes you more money
- And if you don't believe me, just check out the financial results of Jagex, the publisher of *RuneScape* (left, see graph). And those figures include the 'tens of millions' of wasted dollars on the failed *MechScape*.

Free works. It's a better use of capital and it's much less risky. Sometimes I wonder why anyone still charges for a game upfront.

www.gamesbrief.com

Nicholas Lovell is the author of *How to Publish a Game* (www.gamesbrief.com/store/buy). A former investment banker and web entrepreneur, he has been involved in the games industry since 1996.

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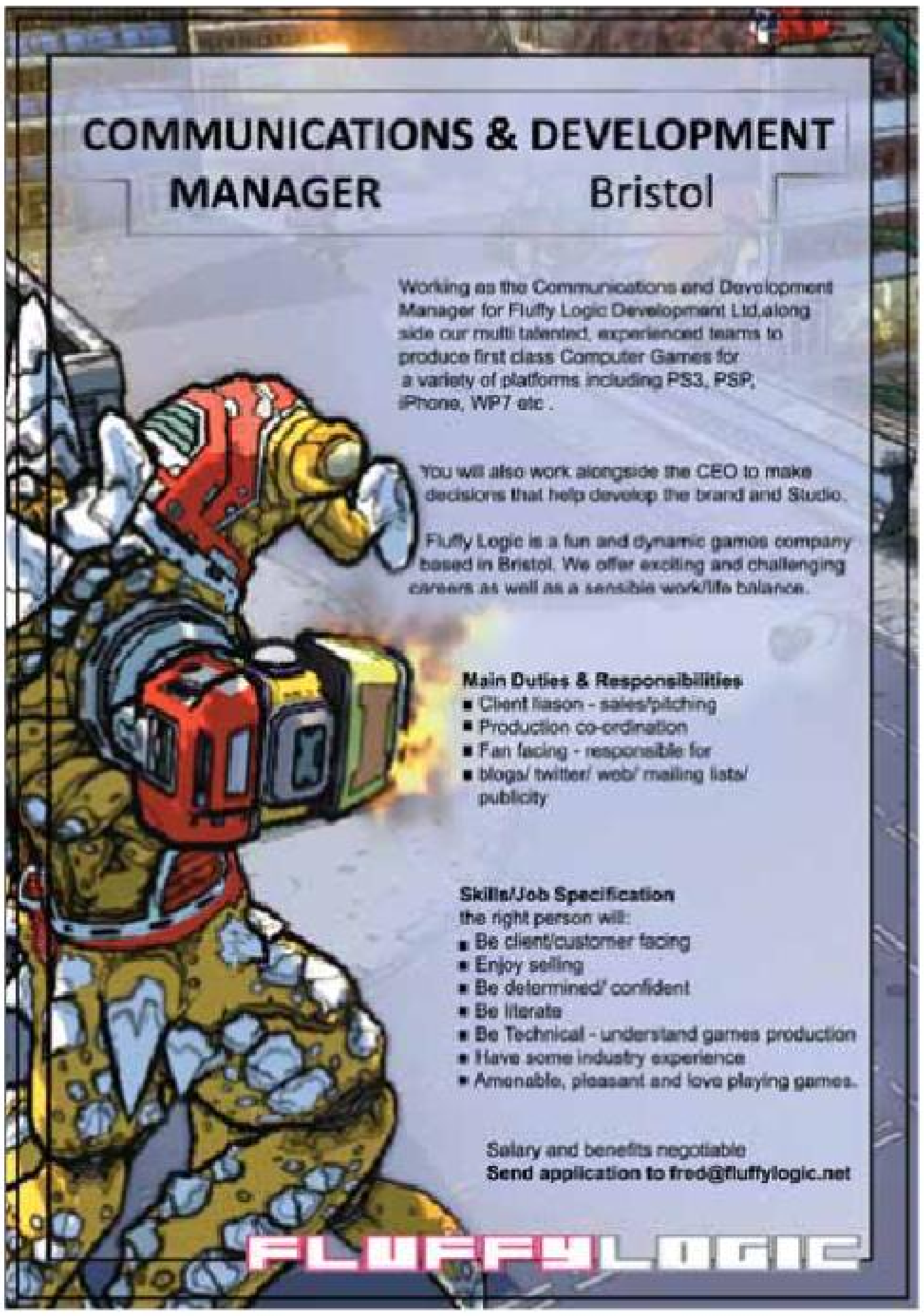

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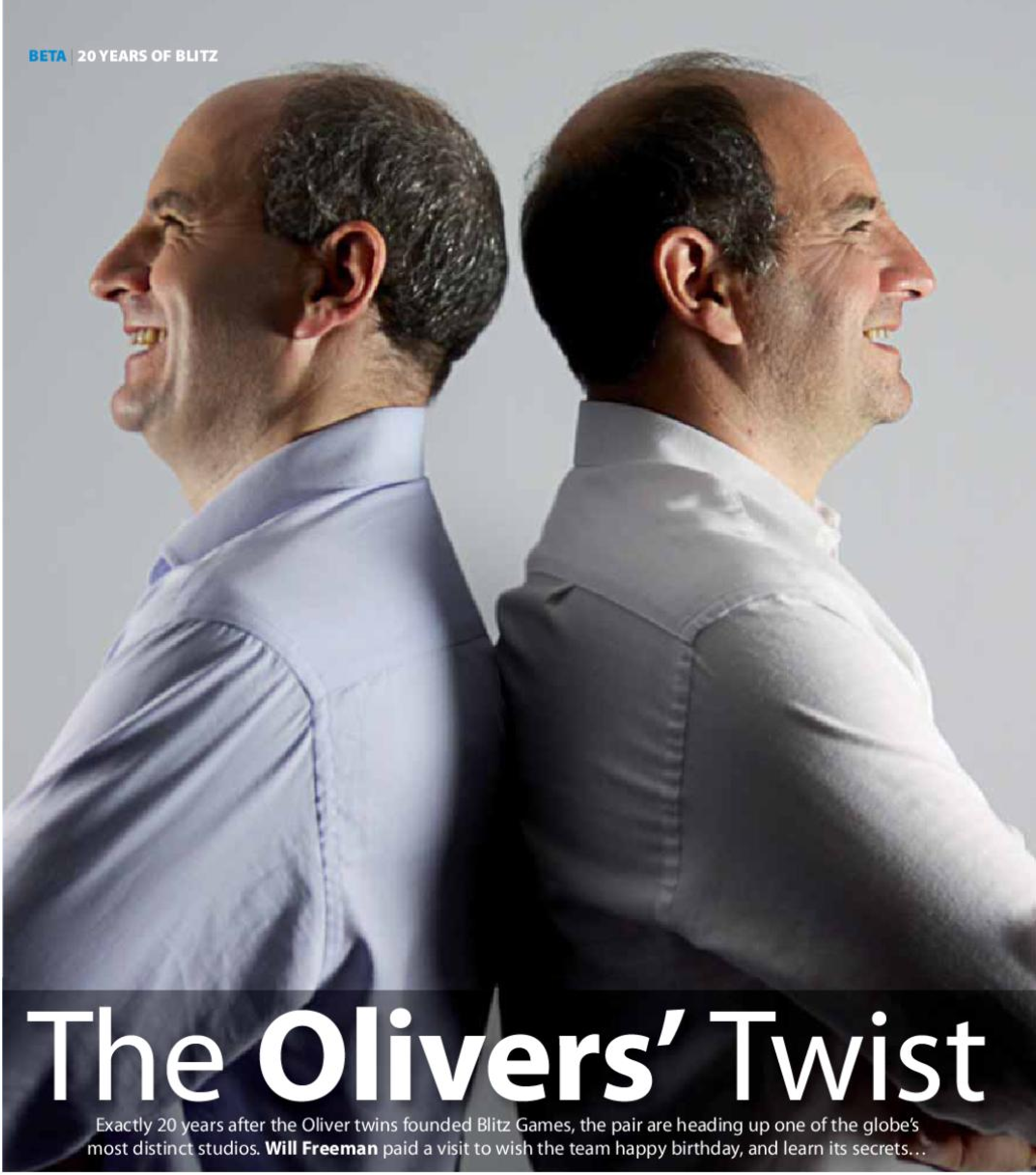


The **Olivers'** Twist

Exactly 20 years after the Oliver twins founded Blitz Games, the pair are heading up one of the globe's most distinct studios. **Will Freeman** paid a visit to wish the team happy birthday, and learn its secrets…

HISTORY IN THE MAKING

CTO Andrew Oliver's guide to Blitz Games Studios' early history, and the milestones that defined its first ten years as a company

1984 Winning the *Saturday Show* game development competition: "It turned a hobby into something more serious."

1984 The launch of the Amstrad CPC: "It was a quite powerful, very good machine, that helped us get the skills to make games that would sell."

1984-1986 Selling games to publishers while at college: "The petrol to get to the publisher almost cost more than we got paid, but we were chuffed to be selling games while still at school."

1985 Meeting Codemasters for the first time: "After we learned how much they might pay, we just went home and did absolutely nothing but code day and night, and we had *Super Robin Hood* within a month. Then we noticed the small print about the payment being based on predicted royalties, but we still did okay."

There's a furious energy at Blitz Game Studios' Leamington Spa base that you'd think would have waned in the 20 years since its famed founders the Oliver twins set up shop in 1990.

Conversations unfurl with ferocious pace as staffers tear through the gangways that subdivide the desks, and all the time there's an atmosphere more typical of a new outfit's opening week. People duck into meeting rooms with urgent messages, stay a while to wax lyrical, and suddenly depart with starting gun urgency.

And yet Blitz Games has two decades behind it, and many years at its location in Leamington Spa. Where that heritage shows is in the organised chaos that covers Blitz's desks, shelves and walls. To draw comparison with a long occupied bedroom would be a little unfair, but the Olivers' kingdom feels a great deal more homely than that offered by the designer lines so familiar in the headquarters of development's *nouveau riche* studios. Media Molecule's new Guildford office is dominated upstairs by a cold metal breakfast bar; Blitz has a free tuck shop.

CHARM OFFENSIVE

Pin down Philip and Andrew Oliver for a moment between their constant lively engaging with their employees over projects ongoing, and it's clear who fosters the energy, character and charisma that is so abundant at Blitz. The pair's passion is infectious, and clearly they have passed on their spirit to those around them.

All very charming, but modest eccentricity isn't the making of Blitz; with six divisions covering core games, downloadables, serious gaming, education, indie publishing and middleware, the company is thriving on some other fuel than personality alone.

"The mix here between realism and creativity is interesting" says Philip. "It's because we come from the route of being extremely creative, but, over time, we've really grown up, and have a bigger respect for doing business. That's been really important to get us where we are today, because there have been too many other studios who have only worried about the creative. You can't do that when running a bigger business," adds the man who carries the title CEO, when in reality his role, like his brother's, encompasses a great deal more than the assigned acronym suggests.

From the off there is talk of evolution and growth, but delving a little deeper into the secrets behind Blitz's 20 years of success, it is clear that from day one the Olivers approached development with a pragmatism that still defines their success.

In fact, the sense of realism predates Blitz's foundation as a limited company in 1990, and goes back to Philip and Andrew's famed passion for making numerous games from their home as ambitious young teenagers in the early 1980s.

"When we got into writing our very early games one of the things that differentiated us from the other people making games, was that they were making games for themselves. They would play a shooter in the arcades, and then try and make it for the Commodore," explains Andrew, who carries the title of CTO.

"We just thought about the fact that we wanted to publish a game, and get it out there to an audience that would want it. We were thinking about an audience, and being realistic. We saw that systems like the Spectrum were best suited to cartoon games, so we thought about the kind of audiences that liked cartoons."

> ***"We have seen so many companies and so many technologies come and go over time, and we do genuinely know what the right thing to do is."***
>
> Philip Oliver, Blitz

When the Olivers won a development competition on the popular kids TV programme *Saturday Show*, which saw their first game published in 1984, their hobby quickly became something more serious, and spurred on by a visit to the stand of the fledgling Codemasters at a trade show in 1985, they quickly began to make games to sell to the publisher.

A period of intense creativity began that saw seven per cent of all games sold in the UK in 1986 carry the Oliver name, making them every part The Beatles of British game development. That pace and fervour exists in far more than residue form today, and every impassioned conversation about working with Kinect or the virtues of serious gaming evokes a strong feeling of what must have been going on in that golden era of the Olivers' early careers.

That same period also saw the establishment of a prototype that would not only play prelude to the BlitzTech middleware solution, but also establish a template for modern game development. Andrew and Philip created their own cross platform development environment that would allow them to build games for the era's number of competing home computing formats.

"We built that, not because we wanted to make lots of money, but because we wanted the widest audience. We wanted to make lots of games to reach lots of people. That was always our goal; just get it out there."

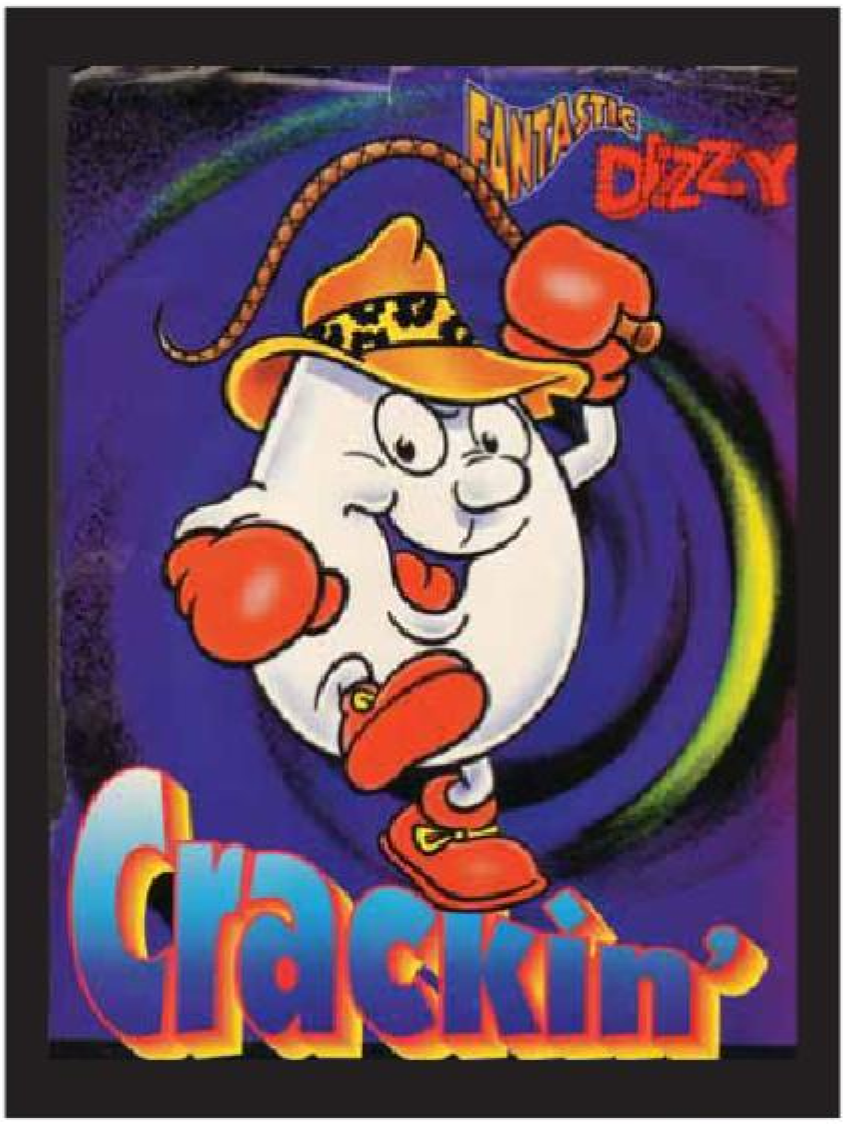
THE SPICE OF LIFE

Years later, after a number of firsts including debuting the release of games on CD and beating the original Xbox to launch with *Fusion Frenzy*, which hit consumers a week before the Microsoft console that was its host, Blitz has an interesting challenge.

Without a defining triple-A title, consumers would be forgiven for wondering what has been keeping Blitz so busy. While the firm's core gaming division Volatile has crafted *Dead to Rights*, the Olivers don't yet have their *Grand Theft Auto* or *LittleBigPlanet*.

Mention that, though, and everyone at Blitz is keen to highlight the boom or bust nature of investing everything in the next *Modern Warfare*. Variety, it seems, is more than the spice of life at Blitz; it's the bedrock on which 20 years of expansion is built.

"We have a deliberate diversification strategy," explains CFO and finance director



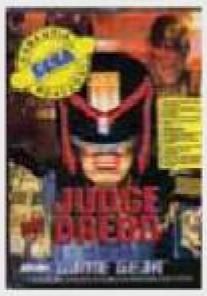
Above: Dizzy remains one of the most warmly remembered of the Olivers' creations

1986 Seven per cent of games sold in the UK are made by the Olivers: "We were working 20 hour days at that point. We were pretty efficient as well. I don't think we threw a line of code or a graphic away, and they were all best sellers."

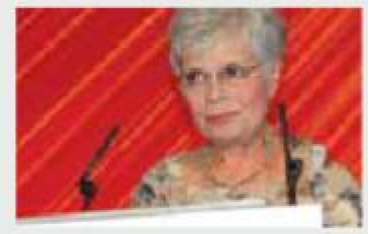
1989 Started hiring freelancers: "We decided to tackle the NES and went to America. We thought we were doing well selling 100,000 or 200,000 copies, and then we saw *Super Mario Bros* on its way to 20 million. So we went onto NES, and that took so much time, we just had to hire people."

1989-1990 Setting up a limited company and moving away from Wiltshire: "We realised it was easier to hire people than to keep negotiating. We still made a lot of mistakes."

1991-1992 Moved to other publishers: "That was a hugely important step for us."



1993 Signed with Develop Award winning agent Jacqui Lyons: "We owe Jacqui a great deal. That was when we started to get titles like the MGM *Wargames* project."



Richard Smithies, a long serving friend of the Olivers who joined the team in 1994, seeing its head count climb from 110 then to almost 230 today.

"If you think about it, the industry is subject to massive uncertainties and changes. That's exciting, and we really like that, but you must be careful not to put all your eggs in one basket. We've seen a number of fantastic studios go bust in recent years because they've done just that.

"You've got to have diversity in clients, and genre, and platform. You can't be a jack of all trades, master of none. In everything we do, we try to be master of that trade, and with a lot of hard work we are. There's a lot of strategic thinking behind the way that we are, and we're continually willing to move and evolve; our work with our Kinect titles shows that."

Amidst the myriad of projects glimpsed through closed doors pushed ajar for a tantalising second during *Develop's* tour, a wealth of on-the-record Kinect titles are underway, including 'movie karaoke' release *Yoostar 2* and the much-publicised family title *The Biggest Loser: Ultimate Workout.*

Those are the work of the Blitz Games division. Meanwhile Volatile busies itself with traditional games, and the Blitz Arcade concerns itself with download titles and short-session experiences. Elsewhere the thriving TruSim serious games division focuses on the development of advanced realistic avatars, which often see adoption by the medical sector for training purposes.

Meanwhile Blitz Academy provides both a link with and service for educational establishments, as well as training opportunities for internal staff to better their skills. BlitzTech provides an increasingly popular engine for licensees looking to match Blitz's quality of development, and marks the final of Blitz's current six divisions

Right: Dead to Rights marks Blitz's most explicit move into the territory of contemporary triple-A game design

> ***"Take good paying projects that you not only believe in, but that also take your studio forwards. Always doing sequels doesn't move you forwards."***
>
> Andrew Oliver, Blitz

There's also the popular Blitz 1-Up element of the company, which gives indies and bedroom coders a hand with anything from tech and creativity to marketing and distribution – all for a proportional share of the profits.

The company boasts two R&D departments – one for art and one for tech – an impressive audio facility, and relatively sizeable internal teams dedicated to pitching, PR, biz dev, and asset creation.

Not bad for an independent developer, and a sign that Blitz's mantra of diversity and agility is one taken very seriously. The challenge there is management, and Blitz's solution is the Studio Development Group; a hand-picked band of discipline specialists that weave together the separate projects.

CONNECTING PEOPLE

Blitz does implement a traditional, relatively flat managerial structure of the vertical nature, where below the execs and managers sit project leads, each supported by groups of artists, coders and other creatives. To stop those collectives becoming cliques, the STG, based in its own space in the heart of Blitz's building, provides a horizontal management structure. The STG head of art, for example, provides connection between each project's artists, meaning progress and initiative is shared and fostered.

Philip demonstrates this management structure with conjurer's arm movements that somehow make perfect sense, and he's keen to point out that the STG are an essential element to the secret of Blitz's ongoing success.

Another ingredient in Blitz's recipe for longevity is its partly altruistic contact with the grass roots of game development, largely through Blitz Academy and Blitz 1-Up.

"Blitz 1-UP is, in a way, a natural extension of things like Blitz Academy. It allows us to be in touch with up and coming developers, and see where ideas are coming from, and lets us be involved in cool indie projects that are often slightly left of the mainstream," confirms Blitz 1-UP producer Neil Holmes. "Also, a lot of these guys could end up coming to work with us at Blitz."

Spend a day at Blitz, and there's so much enthusiasm for what the company offers it can almost overwhelm. The dedication to the workforce is striking, and the creative energy truly exciting – it's little wonder that Blitz is currently enjoying an outbreak of staff celebrating ten or in some cases 15 years serving the company.

"There really is method behind what must seem like madness, and there are constants of passion and enthusiasm. Everything has just got more professional over time, and ultimately, we want to be the Pixar of the games industry" concludes Smithies.

No sooner has the CFO finished, and Andrew rushes to offer advice to other studios looking to go the distance: "You have to take good paying projects that you not only believe in, but that also take your studio forwards. Always doing sequels doesn't move you forwards, unless you can really bring something new to the table."

"We do what is right; not what everybody else does," adds Philip with a confidence as humble as it is assured. "We have been around a long time – just look how old we are – so we have seen so many companies and so many technologies come and go over time, and we do genuinely know what the right thing to do is.

"For that reason we don't wait for other people to approve of how we do things; we honestly are masters of our own destiny."

With a keen eye on the future, a sustainable business model and a dedicated workforce, things look good for the studio. The Olivers joke that in another 20 years they will look like their iconic platforming offspring *Dizzy the Egg*, but they're certain their team will still be creating games with the same buoyant attitude.

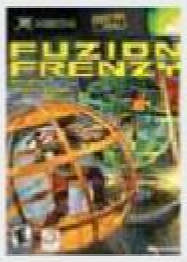
"Look at his face," says Philip, prodding his *Dizzy* mug. "He's bald, but he's optimistic."

1994 Employed Richard Smithie as CFO and finance director: "From that moment on we began to grow enormously."

1995 Backed PlayStation before launch: "That was enormously brave, as at the time you went with Nintendo or Sega. That's what publishers expected."

199X BlitzTech middleware licensed out: "BlitzTech marked another huge moment for us."

2001 *Fusion Frenzy* released as an Xbox launch title: "Bill Gates said at the time it was his favourite Xbox game."



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If you can't beat 'em…

Developers can consider themselves lucky to have sidestepped the world of PR and marketing for so long. Times are changing though, and the renaissance of self-publishing has come at a cost. Fortunately, Play Replay director **Oliver Birch** is here to shed some light on your path through the dark side…

Digital distribution channels, far from being mature themselves, have already opened the doors to a flood of development talent who have taken the plunge into the world of self-publishing.

This new world order brings with it attractive promises – creative freedom, IP ownership, worldwide distribution, studio recognition, revenues and even direct relationships with the end user.

Self-publishing has therefore become more than an experiment; for some it is now a viable and flourishing business model. Developers of all sizes can demonstrate their flair by bringing their own ideas to market and exposing their well conceived game creations to a global gaming audience. This in itself is an empowering shift in the long established games industry retail model and standard developer/publisher relationship.

With this fundamental change we are seeing the renaissance of the independent developer and more recently the advent of the micro studio. This independent route to market commonly unveils many more publishing responsibilities for developer teams; a path that is still full of market risk and project challenges en route to the prospect of commercial success.

THE DARK ARTS

One of the least familiar self-publishing conundrums to unlock is marketing and PR.

So how do you make a start in promoting your game? What do you need to do to get your message out into the world? Who do you speak to? Which strategy is best?

Of course you can use services like PlayReplay's digital content PR and marketing offering, or – shameless plug out of the way – you can take a look at the following basic, but often overlooked, areas of advice. Importantly, all studios are different, no one product is the same and all the digital platforms have their own challenges and opportunities. But the advice below can be generally applied across the board.

■ Allocate plenty of time

Because developing a game is such a huge commitment, sometimes the marketing isn't considered until the development is finished. This is potentially commercially dangerous as having time to plan, secure, implement and maximise the impact of the marketing and PR strategy will pay dividends in the long run.

Ideally the marketing thought process should start at the first design and concept stage. Using this time to identify what makes your game unique and stand out will allow you to build a strategy and plan that will engage, entertain and inform gamers well in advance of the game's release.

> ***"Marketing should be a part of any product's development and self promotion is the new skill that developers must learn to survive in the brave new world of self-publishing."***

There is plenty of legwork to do when marketing a game and internal resource and dedicated time should be factored into the development timeline. Be prepared to write press releases, complete first-party copy approvals and create stunning assets to promote the game. Every title is competing with the budgets of the triple-A guys for media space so this is an important time to raise the bar.

It is also worth noting that some first-party marketing teams won't discuss platform marketing plans until code has passed its submission process, so this must be factored into overall timetables and release slot selections.

Here's a tip: Build in time to negotiate media exclusives. Exclusive editorial will not only help build your media relationships, but these stories tend to create more buzz around the product in the short term.

■ Know the platform marketing support opportunities

Equivalent to the in-store presence of retail games, marketing support on the digital shelf is a key part of the marketing mix, required to influence customers whilst they are engaged on the platform and at the potential point of purchase.

Securing product presence and visibility on any of the individual gaming platforms is a task that can only be helped by a solid media engagement plan. Featured placements, exclusive game assets, price promotions, competitions and editorial content-led promotional channels such as Inside Xbox and FirstPlay are just some of the obvious options available.

Negotiation will be required to achieve any platform support and this will be heavily influenced by the development team's knowledge of the available marketing inventory and their relationship with the platform's first party marketing teams. The advice here is to reach out to the right contacts, get cosy early, ask lots of questions and whenever possible push for marketing commitment in advance.

Here's a tip: PlayStation Home is a fast-growing platform community of gamers that should be included when building a promotional strategy for PSN titles.

■ Own the customer relationship

In today's connected online world, community forums, user generated commentary and social networking websites have empowered consumers to have a published opinion and accessible platform by which to influence others.

Throughout a promotional campaign there will be opportunities to harness these modes of communication and engage with the consumer directly. Here it is possible to create a valuable fan base through the dialogue of ideas, questions and feedback, benefiting the product whilst developing the relationship with the end user. This is a powerful exchange and can help formulate product opinion and drive important word of mouth, chatter and buzz around a product to a wider audience.

Another tip: Share the development process. Gamers today are fascinated with games development and want to know how you came up with all the ideas for the game and be party to early concept art and videos. Publishing a blog or keeping a diary of these events to publish later will provide you with a unique story behind the game.

Obviously these insights only scratch the surface of any detailed marketing plan and there is no substitute for experience. But these three principles can shape the mindset behind marketing a self-published game if it doesn't exist at the outset. Simply put, marketing should be a part of any product's development, and self promotion is the new skill that developers must learn to survive in the brave new world of self-publishing.

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amiqus GAMES

United they stand

As our Game Changers series continues, Unity is next to take to the stage. **Will Freeman** takes a look at the popular engine and its plans for the future in a constantly evolving industry...

Above: Unity's Nicholas Francis and his team are preparing a number of 'saucy' new features

There is no doubt that Unity deserves its place on the Game Changers list. Headquartered in San Francisco, the engine firm has been in a driving force in the democratisation of game development since its conception in 2001.

Almost a decade later, and five years after its official founding, the outfit can boast an impressive 200,000 registered users covering a huge range of games making experience. From first time coders using the free version to the likes EA, Bigpoint, Ubisoft and NASA harnessing the power of the engine's fully fledged edition, Unity has caught the attention of studios large and small.

This year alone Unity's web-player saw its 30 millionth instillation, and the company left the Develop Awards with the coveted Grand Prix Award and the Technical Innovation gong. The firm is also headed up by an approachable, enthusiastic team who have developed a deserved reputation as some of the most amicable members of the industry. They care about games, and their delight at their success is consistently endearing.

"We've got Unity 3 coming up real soon now," confirms Nicholas Francis, company co-founder and chief creative officer. "This is our largest release ever with a bunch of saucy high-end features; our users get the full Beast lightmapping solution, Umbra PVS and lots of updates to audio, physics, and more. I can't wait to get it out; Unity 3 will be our biggest feature set ever, best performance – and we've spent a ridiculous amount of time on hunting down bugs and spit-polishing a lot of tools. I think people will just go 'wow' when they see it – at least that's what we're hearing from our 3,500 beta testers."

Unity is a company with boundless ambition; a fact that has played a significant part in its establishment as a prolific tool in a changing industry. The firm is poised to add Android and PS3 to its rostrum of supported platforms, which already includes the Apple portables, web, Mac PC, Wii and 360.

IN THE BEGINNING

"Back in the day, we wanted to make the game engine's equivalent of Photoshop," says Francis. "Basically we wanted to provide an easy-to-use tool to author high-quality games. That focus meant that we always had a razor-sharp focus on making the tools be accessible.

"Most other engines are authored for in-house use and then someone turned around and said 'Maybe we can sell this'. We've never had that mindset – because of that we've just spent so much more effort on making things quick and easy to get into, and having a tool that works. We don't just do a monthly release of whatever our internal team is working on – we actually make sure that things work."

> ***We've just spent so much more effort on making things quick and easy to get into, and having a tool that works. We don't just do a monthly release.***
>
> *Nicholas Francis, Unity*

In pursuit of staying acutely relevant, Unity has developed a two-pronged approach.

Firstly, the team makes sure it speaks with it users and find out what they need most.

"There's a fine line between figuring out what they'd like to have and what would really make a difference, and it's one where we're looking very closely at what we can do," admits Francis.

Secondly, the Unity heads insist on implementing a 'Fridays Are For Fun' rule. As the weekend nears, developers can just work on something they want to work on; a fact that has allowed Unity to introduce features that make it one of the most topical pieces of tech on the market. The Friday rule has instigated a wealth of new features, from small fixes to significant new introductions.

The Unity team also has an eye on opportunities outside of the sphere of the established industry; a quality that has meant it has developed a reputation for pushing the envelope, making a bit more room inside for its technology, clients, and increasingly, the industry as a whole.

TIME WILL TELL

Spend time with the Unity staff, and you'll hear about 'gamification'. It may be a slightly ungainly term, but the process it refers to – gameplay as a mechanism outside of gaming to make mundane interactions more engaging – is one Unity is keenly monitoring.

Unity doesn't draw the line at gamification either, as Francis reveals in highlighting another fashion that has piqued the firm's interest: "The other trend is a more pervasive gaming; where you can take your game with you. Tiger Woods Online was a nice example. You can play a round at work. When your boss comes in you just close the browser. When you get home, you can fire up your home machine and pick up where you left off."

Unity isn't just ready for the future; it is part the process shaping it. The technology company continues to develop features that cater for what player will want tomorrow, and what developers can do about that today, and it is that fact more than any other that makes it stand out as a worthy representative of the Game Changers.

www.unity3d.com

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IN ASSOCIATION WITH...

Amiqus Games is a leading provider of specialist talent to the video games industry. The company recruits for some of the world's premier studios for artists, animators, producers, programmers, designers and executives such as studio heads and director level roles.

Convenience Stored

If it fulfils its potential, Gaikai's vision of accessible cloud gaming could reshape every facet of the industry. **Will Freeman** asked founder David Perry what makes his plan so game changing…

Above: from left to right - Gaikai's David Perry, Andrew Gault and Rui Pereira

If the companies selected as part of our Game Changers series are supposed to be organisations that attempt to shape a mould for the future of game development, and don't shy away from taking risks, then Gaikai fits the bill absolutely.

Gaikai's vision of accessible high-end cloud gaming is a simple, bold concept born from founder David Perry's belief that distribution has a lot to learn from other industries. Consumers test drive cars, argues Perry, and flick through magazines in the newsagent before they take them to the counter, so why not games?

"A big problem with gaming is the latest games always come with friction, meaning for consumers it's going to the store, waiting for mail, having to register or to download some monster file," Perry suggests.

"Time is precious, and people are becoming more impatient than ever; just see how many people abort when their YouTube video starts to stutter. Gaming loses countless players the same way, so the first sign of friction and people bail."

Sighting *FarmVille's* barnstorming momentum as a case in point for the potential of convenience as a keystone of a game's success, Perry is clearly an ambitious man. If Gaikai can make accessing major new titles normally confined to a disk or swollen download file as successful as Zynga's best, it could be that cloud gaming will join the likes of the Wii and 360 as a 'proper' format in the public and wider industry's conscious.

It's certainly an endearing proposition, and one that could give the entire ecosystem of game development, publication and distribution an invigorating shake up.

GAME PLAN

"Gaikai is designed for the web," says Perry. "It uses the idea that you shouldn't bring the gamer to the game, you should bring the game to the gamer. It sounds simple but it is a paradigm change in the cost of acquiring players and it's a million times more convenient for gamers."

Attracting more players for less money sounds like a very good deal for developers. With Gaikai subscriptions being free for the player, and players able to Tweet a friend without any game download a URL that will have them playing in seconds, it certainly sounds like the platform could be a great boon for the industry.

What Gaiki must do is forge relationships with developers. It's going to be a tough gig, but Perry has something on his side.

> ***The cloud is a hot space right now. It's like crazy nuclear hot. I have investors calling constantly as they understand the value proposition.***
>
> *David Perry, Gaikai*

"When you are old like me, you hold on to the one benefit, that's having lots of industry friends," states Perry. "After all these years, I've met thousands of people, and that helps a lot when I need to get meetings with decision makers. So far every publisher I've spoken to really likes what we are doing.

"The first major publisher deal was with Electronic Arts; they signed up lots of their key franchises and paid for the service in advance. They really understand the value of getting all of the friction out of the system and want to let their gamers play instantly and share."

A DECENT PROPOSAL

Winning round giants like EA is a huge step for Gaikai, and testament to its ability, but what about the proletariat developers working the front line of games making? According to Perry, they will warm to the idea there's a technical solution about to become available that can massively increase the reach of their games. That sounds a reasonable selling point. Add the fact that Gaikai don't charge anything for clicks or for finding, and it could be that many more teams are won round to Perry's intrepid new vision for gaming.

But, really, is Gaikai evoking all that much excitement in people?

"The cloud is a hot space right now," insists Perry, adding: "It's like crazy nuclear hot. I have investors calling constantly as they understand the value proposition. I've been so damn lucky in my career to be at the right place at the right time. I got the rights to the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and it totally changed the course of my career, then *Aladdin*, then the *Matrix* when it was the hottest movie franchise."

Perry's conviction that cloud gaming represents the future is what makes Gaikai stand out as a company. He and his colleagues' unflinching dedication to the concept has brought them a long way, and with the momentum and support they are already courting, it looks like they will go a great deal further.

"Convenience and price are huge to consumers," concludes Perry. "I bet if we can get the price of gaming down, and make it 100 times more convenient. Then cloud gaming will become how most of us check out digital games and even tools and software applications."

www.gaikai.com

IN ASSOCIATION WITH…

Amiqus Games is a leading provider of specialist talent to the video games industry. The company recruits for some of the world's premier studios for artists, animators, producers, programmers, designers and executives such as studio heads and director level roles.

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London Calling!

Following its huge popularity running alongside the Develop Conference in Brighton, we're bringing Evolve to the big city with the launch of Evolve in London on 8 December 2010.

What is Evolve?

Innovation is speeding up. Social gaming and Internet connectivity has gone from fringe to mainstream in barely a AAA development cycle. So how can game developers best adapt to this changing market?

Evolve in London is a day-long conference exploring emerging platforms, new business models and the integration of Internet services and user-generated content.

The day consists of 14 sessions - including a keynote, interactive presentations and panel debates, plus a networking lunch. To close, there's another chance to mix with other delegates and speakers over a few beers.

Who's it aimed at?

Whether you're a producer tasked with integrating connected features into your games, a designer exploring user-generated content and Facebook, or someone interested in exploiting the expanding crossover of TV, social networking, mobile devices and today's connected games consoles, **Evolve** is a must-attend event for you.

Previous Evolve attendees include:

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> **"I really enjoyed the spirit of looking forward I found at Evolve. So many conferences are about products or processes that are directly in front of us. Evolve seemed refreshingly focused on the trends that define our business." Louis Castle, Instant Action**

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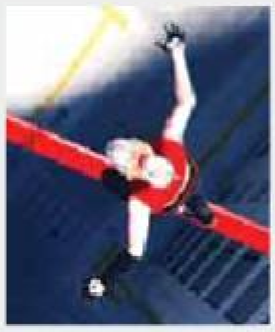

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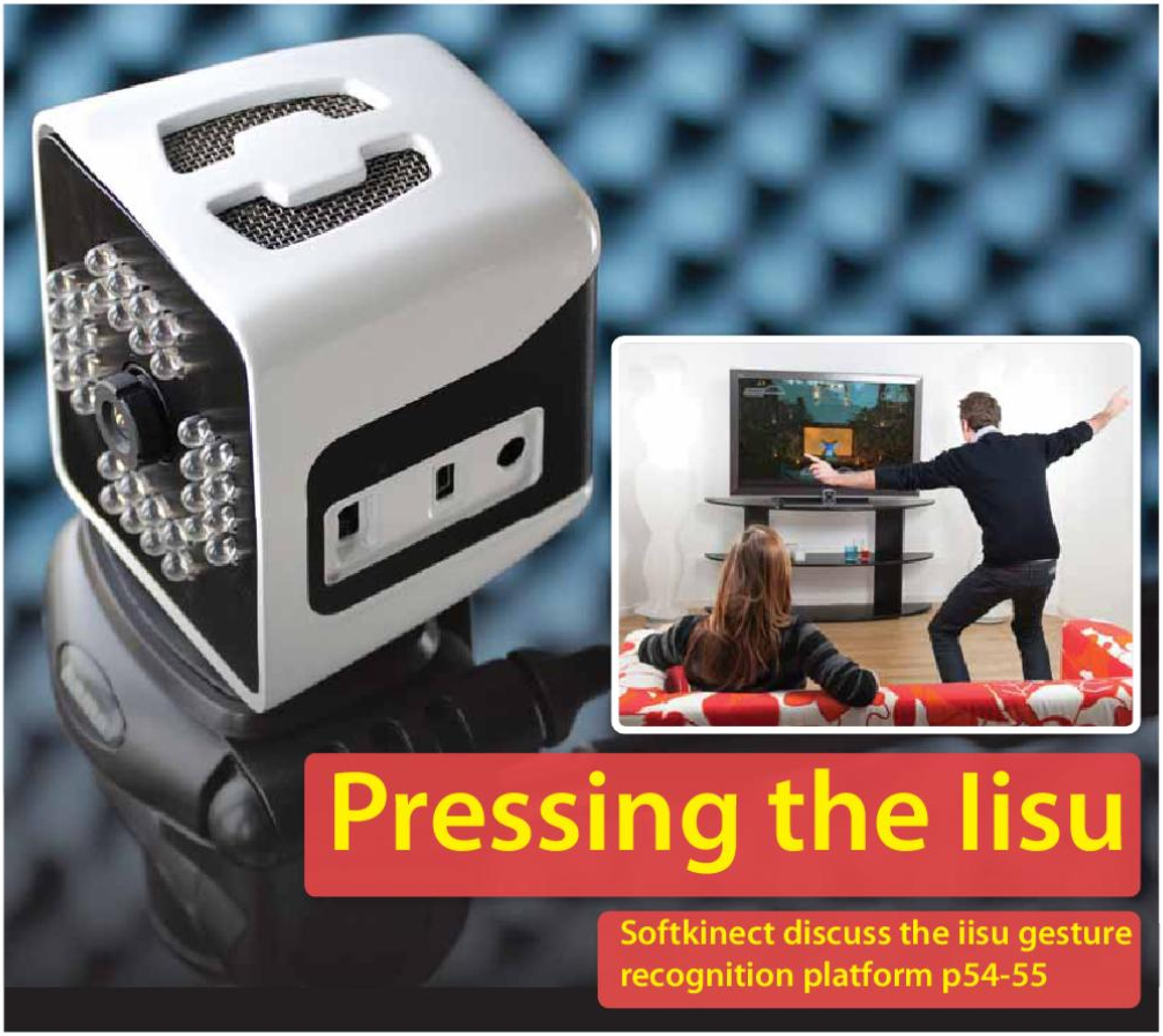

Pressing the Iisu

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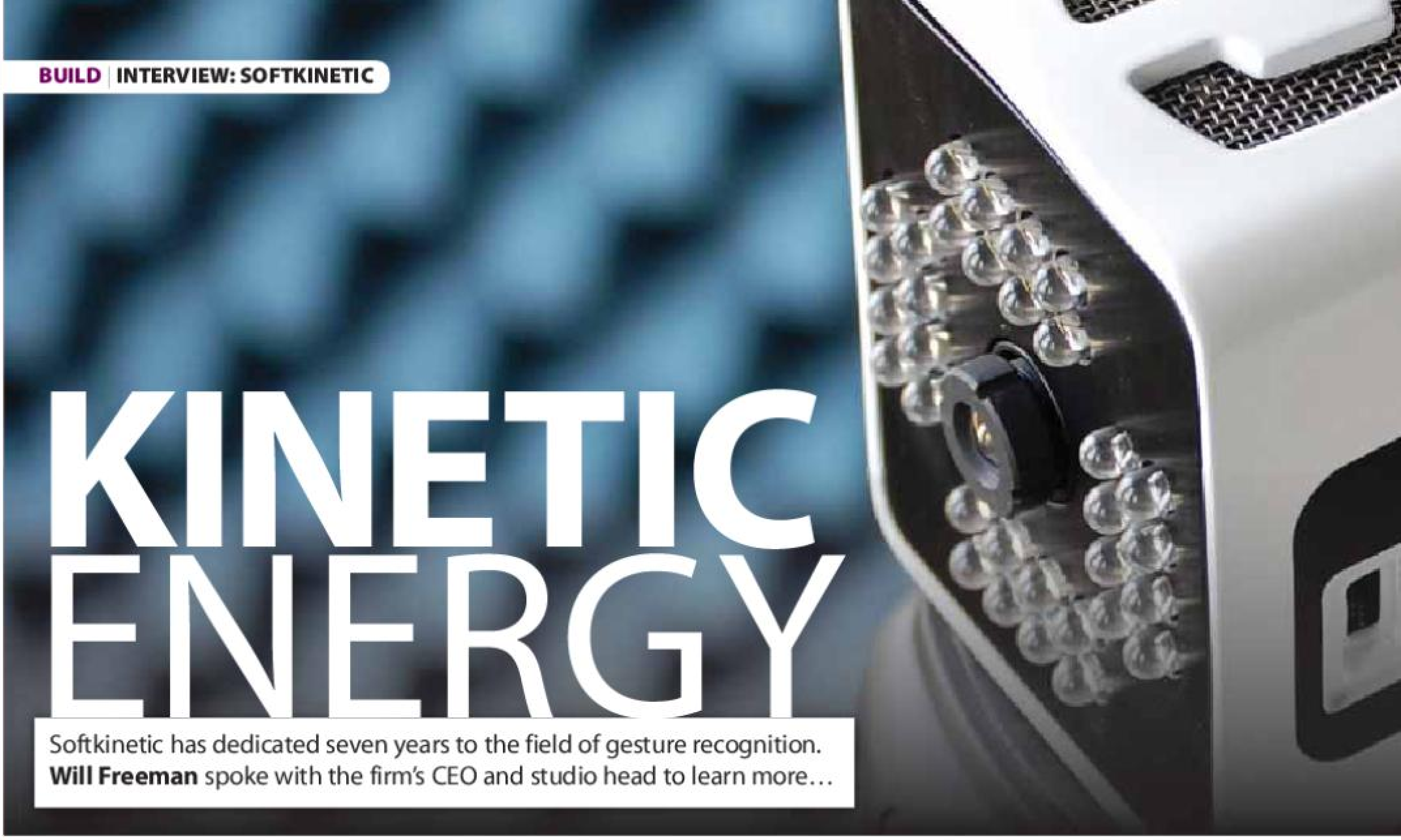


KINETIC ENERGY

Softkinetic has dedicated seven years to the field of gesture recognition. **Will Freeman** spoke with the firm's CEO and studio head to learn more…

Above: Familiarity with the tech is most important, says Studio head Mike Nichols

The industry's recent history has been kind to Softkinetic Studios. As the public and platform holders continue to obsess over the virtues of motion control, the Belgium-based company's long established gesture recognition expertise proves remarkably topical today.

Softkinetic's Iisu real-time 3D gesture recognition software platform has already been embraced by those involved in traditional and serious gaming, and even found favour with the worlds of marketing, advertising and healthcare.

Pitched as compatible with all major 3D depth-sensing devices, its name may be one that will become far more familiar in the coming months.

All of which makes CEO Michel Tombroff and studio head Mike Nichols the perfect people to cast their eyes over the likes of Kinect and Move, offer some insight on how to best handle developing for workable gesture control, and explain where Iisu fits into the increasingly complex equation.

You're in multiple markets – which has proven most responsive and interested in gestural interfaces?

Tombroff: Generally speaking, the home entertainment and video gaming market is on the leading edge, because this audience has always been the early adopter of new technology.

That said, however, advertising and healthcare markets have also been quick to get their hands on this technology. Its ease of use and depth of experience make it perfectly suited for interactive displays and various gesture-based fitness and rehabilitation solutions.

And talk us through Iisu; what is it? What's your target audience?

Tombroff: Our target audience is gesture-based application developers. Iisu supports all types of 3D motion capture devices and completely insulates the developer from the low level technicalities. It provides real-time information about the user's position, body parts and gestures, and can be used to animate 3D avatars.

Nichols: From a developer's viewpoint, Iisu is an incredibly robust piece of middleware that enables development teams to create compelling experiences using natural gesture input. Without Iisu we'd have no way to create these experiences.

> **“*Iisu supports all types of 3D motion capture devices and completely insulates the developer from the low level technicalities.*”**
>
> Michel Tombroff, Softkinetic

Softkinetic has collaborated with EA – are those experiments something we'll see in finished products by either of you?

Tombroff: Our collaboration with EA focused on sports-related content. Since then, Softkinetic has released several finished sports-related products, including football and soccer applications, and announced a partnership with NaturalMotion regarding the adaptation of *BackBreaker Football*.

What are your thoughts on the three current gaming gesture interfaces Wii Remote, Move and Kinect? What are they doing right? What are they doing wrong?

Tombroff: Wii, Move and Kinect are all excellent input devices. Although in function they are quite different from one another, they all share a common goal to make gaming more broadly accessible, entertaining and involved. Wii obviously took the biggest leap of faith in this field. For what seems now like a foregone conclusion, Nintendo in fact took one of the biggest gambles in console gaming, and thankfully for us – as consumers – it paid off for them.

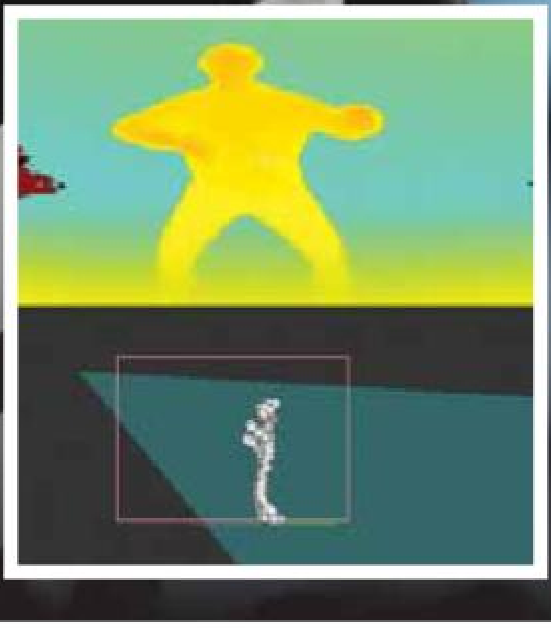
By combining a light wand and 2D camera, the PS3's Move 3D positioning and precise control will certainly bring some welcome new experiences to the platform. Kinect obviously deviates from its console counterparts by doing away with the physical controller altogether.

Because Kinect uses a 3D camera to capture the physical motions of the players as input, Kinect experiences will feel significantly different from Sony's Move and Nintendo's Wii gaming systems.

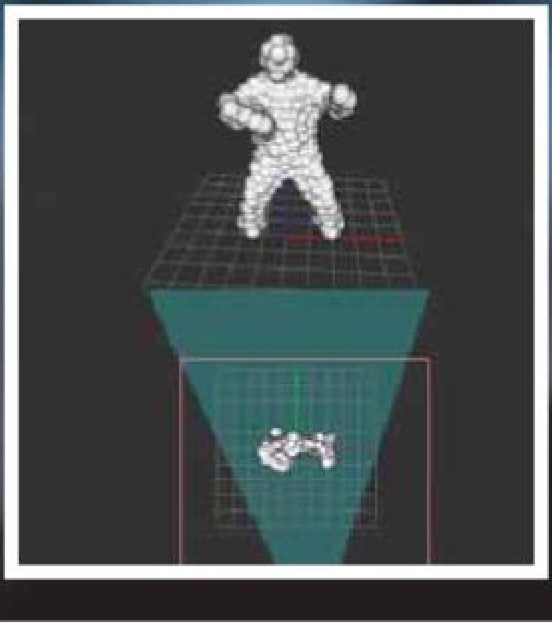
It's easy to say Nintendo has the edge right now, because they've been out the longest and have sold the most consoles of this generation so far. And let's be honest, if Nintendo hadn't sold the pants off its competition we wouldn't be talking about these other input devices. All console companies are competitive with one another, and want the edge that will enable them to outsell their competitors. Will these new input devices from Sony and Microsoft give them the edge they need to claim victory when the dust on this generation settles? Who knows? Just looking at the different launch strategies between Microsoft Kinect and Sony Move may give some insight into their confidence. Microsoft seems to be putting significantly more effort into the launch of Kinect, versus what's happening for Sony's Move. That hardly means Move is doomed, but Sony should figure out how to move into the attack rather than react.

For all of us in the development community, and certainly for the gaming public at large, this is all welcome news. We

Below: The Iisu real-time 3D gesture recognition software platform is designed to be absolutely robust



Left: Softkinetic's offering proves incredibly timely considering the arrival of the Wii, Move and Kinect



get more cool toys to play with, and better games to boot.

What's been the best implementation of motion-recognition you've seen outside of games that game developers should pay attention to?
Nichols: The best implementations in natural gesture recognition have to be in the movies, in particular in the area of user interfaces. Hollywood has put some incredible visuals behind the idea of natural gesture interfaces in movies like *Iron Man*. Who wouldn't want to spend some time in Tony Stark's lab? Personally, I can't wait to see what the designers do in *Tron 2*.
Tombroff: Game developers should always pay attention and react to user input. Films like *Iron Man* show this very well. In the film, every action is met by a bold reaction. The interface is constantly reacting and giving feedback to all the inputs made by the user, or actor. Obviously, this is done to create a visually stunning film, but in reality we need to provide this for users to understand more clearly how their actions control the game. I hear a lot of developers worry about player fatigue with gesture-based gaming.

But in reality, frustration drives fatigue above all else. Not providing accurate feedback to a player's input is a sure way to frustrate any user.

Some recent work using Iisu by the physical rehabilitation company Silverfit is also quite remarkable. They have developed exercise programs for seniors using our 3D gesture recognition technology, by combining very robust gesture tracking with simple and efficient gameplay.

What's been the best in games that you have seen? And what about the worst?
Tombroff: The best implementations for any new technology, like natural gesture input, exploit the strengths of that tech, with game mechanics designed to play to those strengths. Most poor implementations with this new technology have tried to convert existing control schemes, which simply does not work well. In creating a natural gesture input game, developers need to spend time getting to know the tech and discovering what works well and what doesn't. More than any other previous control input, 3D natural input changes the way we design games.

> ***"From a developer's viewpoint, Iisu is an incredibly robust piece of middleware that enables teams to create compelling experiences"***
> Mike Nichols, Softkinetic

When talking about Move, Sony mentions the need to have buttons on controllers. It's a different technology, but broadly doesn't that mean, even when faced with something more 'natural' than gesture tech, designers and consumers will always rely on physical, tangible interfaces?
Nichols: I don't think the broad consumer even knows how to use the TV remote. That's not a dig at the broad consumer; it's really meant as a dig at manufacturers of those devices. For years we've been adding buttons to cope with the expanding list of features only to concoct a device to control a dizzying array of menus. The same is true for gaming. Natural gesture input requires us to design control schemes that are more immersive and therefore make games that are more fun to play.

Softkinetic Studios was founded last year – almost 12 months on, what's the progress of that team? What are they working on?
Nichols: I was really excited to join such an experienced and motivated team in Softkinetic Studios four months ago. They have more experience designing for natural gesture than any other studio in the world. We all share the same passion that we are truly creating on the cutting edge and the challenges and rewards it brings.

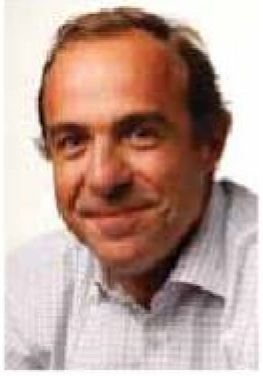
The team has been developing for a wide array of projects for arcades, set-top boxes, and consoles. Recently, the team just released an interactive billboard for the Disney film *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*.

The great thing about an interactive billboard is that it gives the public a chance to use this technology without having to buy anything. Anyone can simply walk up and play. The team is currently busy creating some terrific new experiences that we'll be able to announce sometime in the New Year.

There's a lot of talk about latency and lag for all the motion control/ gesture interfaces. What's the secret to dealing with this? Is it something we can eradicate over time or a problem that is always going to remain as software and hardware have to react to user behaviour?
Nichols: Latency is not an inherent issue with all natural gesture input platforms. Latency is platform specific.

Again, using the example of the interactive billboard that we created for *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, that experience had no lag.

For the next generation of arcade systems already using this technology, again there is no lag. Even on lower-end systems, lag from the user perspective is almost imperceptible. In my experience, the talk about latency is just that – all talk.
www.softkinetic.net



Above: CEO Michel Tombroff has been impressed by the film industry's work with gesture recognition

KEYRELEASE

WebVision

Felix Roeken has overseen the life of an exciting product in the VisionEngine during his tenure as Trinigy general manager. Now a new browser game engine framework called WebVision is set light up the browser-based games market. **Stuart Richardson** caught up with Roeken to find out more…

Felix Roeken understands the development process acutely. This is something that comes across when considering not just the assurance in his words, but the history behind both the man and the company of which he is general manager, Trinigy.

The German 3D tech firm, which also has offices in Texas, is best known for for its popular and ever-improving Vision Engine. Recently however, it released a new browser game engine framework called WebVision, to be made available to everyone who has licensed the Vision Engine. But it doesn't end there.

"It has been a busy year for us both in terms of technology and business," Roeken explains.

"In March, we launched Vision Engine 8 with a number of new features, tools, workflow improvements, partner integrations with Havok and Perforce, and optimised performance for all platforms. We just announced support for Autodesk FBX and WebVision."

Roeken is proud of the pace and volume of work his company is undertaking, and is keen to clarify the effects of this ethos.

"2010 has also been a huge year of expansion for us as well as an all-time record year in revenue. We've seen tremendous global interest for our new technology. We've opened an office in Northern Germany. We've been hiring in all regions. What's gratifying is that all of this growth has come organically, with no VC in the background."

And on the subject of the WebVision, its genesis and what Trinigy hopes to achieve with it as a new platform, Roeken is just as keen to open up.

"Games delivered through and played in browsers have really grown in popularity over the last few years. But what we've also seen is that there is now larger demand for browser-based games that both look and play like console games," he explains.

"WebVision is a development framework integrated with the Vision Engine that lets developers of browser-based games capitalise on the Vision Engine's extensive feature set and cross-platform performance in order to bring games with stunning visual quality and immersive gameplay to browsers. WebVision is included free-of-charge in the Vision Engine SDK to Vision licensees, and supports all common PC browsers, including Explorer, Firefox, Chrome and Opera."

ALL PART OF THE PLAN

Over the years a certain level of quality has become expected from the technology that Trinigy produces, and the support it gives to the users of it. In order to ensure that these hallmarks of the company's success are maintrained, Roeken has plans.

"We're focusing a lot of energy on expansion, which includes hiring for various positions and opening new offices. Our development staff is already busy on the next version of the Vision Engine, which unfortunately we can't talk about yet. And of course, we are already planning our next steps with WebVision," he says.

"On a more personal note, we're really looking forward to witnessing the release of some key Vision-based titles, like *Arcania – Gothic 4*, as well as the unveiling of some great titles that are yet to be made public."

> ***There is now larger demand for browser-based games that both look and play like console games.***
>
> Felix Roeken, Trinigy

And Roeken knows why he believes people should pick up WebVision at the first possible opportunity.

"WebVision serves the growing segmentation in browser games by offering developers a development environment for creating graphically rich environments and complex, immersive gameplay. It has all the power of a fully-fledged game engine, as well as Vision's renowned modularity and flexible workflow. It includes Trinigy's premier support. And, if you're a Vision Engine licensee, it's free-of-charge," he laughs.

"The beauty of WebVision is that developers can use it in a variety of ways. It can act as an additional game platform, a tool to create marketing and sales demos, a new method of generating revenue. The possibilities are endless, and I look forward to seeing all the different ideas our customers come up with."

BACK TO THE FUTURE

The future is not something that weighs heavily on Roeken, and it feels safe to assume that his optimism is something that is shared across Trinigy.

"It is no longer a retail world, nor is it a triple-A vs. casual world. More and more gaming platforms and distribution channels are segmenting the market. On the one hand, that's good, as it will generate more channels of revenue in the games market.

"On the other hand, games will have to either cover a much broader range of platforms or strongly focus on niches or specific platform experiences. Consequently, business models and revenues for publishers will further evolve and diversify to meet these changes," he forecasts.

"Middleware providers will have to tackle and serve this new world. It will take agility and foresight.

"For Trinigy, changing our licensing long ago, focusing time on making the Vision Engine as flexible and modular as possible, and launching WebVision are just some examples of how we're evolving to meet market needs. As the market transforms we'll continue to evolve. Stay tuned."

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BANDWIDTH AID

It doesn't matter how slick your game is. Without bandwidth optimisation it might not make the grade. Thankfully Sony's **Vinod Tandon** is here with some invaluable advice...

Gone are the days of the arcade and lining up to play against the best hardcore gamers in the neighbourhood.

Technology has brought us into an age where the in-home networked game console and computer have taken over. With online games, players can collect achievements or trophies, view and compare their stats, create clans for team play, and participate in online tournaments. Now the average gamer can try their luck against their neighbourhood or distant friends, as well as play against the best hardcore gamers in the world. Gamers can even be dynamically matched against other players in skill, all from the comfort of their own home, 24/7.

Increasingly, more multiplayer games are running over the internet and the ever-expanding in-game player counts bring about the challenge of bandwidth optimisation. Additionally, sending increased amounts of latency-critical data across the internet can be hard to manage. Developers implementing online games in the real-world will encounter many technical challenges, such as choosing an effective network topology, determining the normal send rate for the specific type of game, or estimating the bandwidth rate for a targeted territory.

This article highlights the challenges a developer will face and provides them with the information they require for creating and optimising a game title for real-time online play. Whether a title offers competitive or co-operative online gameplay, having a robust online implementation that can operate under a multitude of consumer internet connections can increase the longevity of a game title, and can serve as an effective tactic to fight against used games sales.

PICKING THE RIGHT NETWORK TOPOLOGY

Game clients communicate with one another in-game through a selected network topology, which directly affects their bandwidth usage.

While many network topologies exist, the three most widely used on the PlayStation Network are: peer-to-peer, dedicated server and integrated server.

Peer-to-peer (P2P) offers a direct flow of network traffic from all game clients to all other game clients without the need for a central game server. In this topology, each client is connected to every other game client, forming a fully connected grid.

> ***"More multiplayer games are running over the internet and the ever-expanding in-game player counts bring about the challenge of bandwidth optimisation."***

A dedicated server utilises a centralised game server hosted in the internet cloud.

All clients in-game are connected to this server. Client communication travels to the server before being routed to all other clients in the game.

An integrated server is similar to a dedicated server, except one of the clients in-game is responsible for routing the game data instead of a separate dedicated machine. All clients are connected to this server where game traffic travels to before being relayed to all other clients in-game.

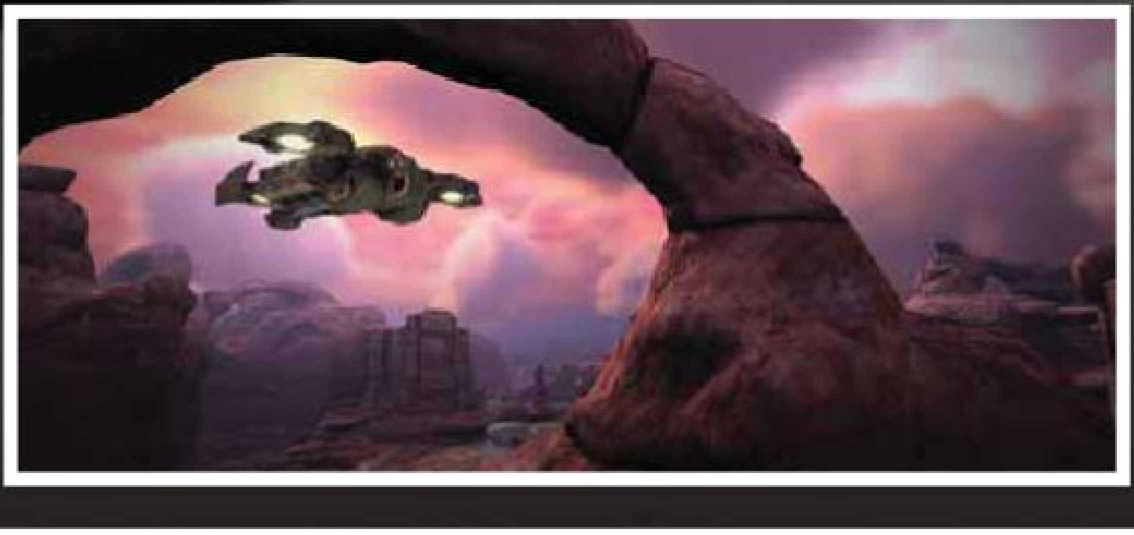
Selection of a network topology is a critical first step in implementing the online component of a multiplayer game, and is predominately based on player count. Games with large player counts (more than 50 players), require more bandwidth and horsepower, and will choose to use a dedicated server configuration. Medium sized games (under 50 players) will generally use the integrated server solution. Games with smaller player counts (under 10 players) can benefit from the use of the P2P topology, which typically boasts lower latency than the integrated server model.

Online console games now feature higher player counts than were previously available to consumers. To manage the resources of a 256-player game, game titles such as *MAG* utilise the dedicated server topology and take advantage of cutting edge workstation hardware. A dedicated server can easily host more players in game than their integrated server counterparts, which are limited by the resources available on today's generation of consoles. However, dedicated servers cost money to purchase and host, which is the key contributing factor to lowering player count requirements and choosing a cheaper network topology.

The integrated server network topology is utilised by games like *Warhawk* to reduce hosting costs. In this topology, one player in-game is chosen to be the server in which all in-game clients connect to. Before selecting a client to be the server, the game title will try to choose the most appropriate client (the one with the best network connection) to be the integrated server. Hosting costs are reduced since the game is being hosted on one of the player's internet connection.

Although a dedicated server can be costly to host, it generally allows a certain level of connection quality that can be assured for all players in-game. Dedicated servers rarely disconnect in the middle of a game. Integrated servers, on the other hand, are controlled by a player in-game. Players can quit out of game or shut down the server at any time. With the integrated server model, developers must devise solutions to handle if

Sony has prefected its bandwidth optimisation method with titles as varied as Fat Princess and Grand Turismo 5 Prologue



Above: The robust nature of Warhawk's online element became a showcase of the PS3's online ability

the server prematurely disconnects from the game. This amounts to migrating the server responsibilities and state to another client, which is referred to as host migration.

Host migration and the need for NAT traversal are two of the biggest disadvantages for integrated server and P2P network topologies. NAT traversal issues, however, can be mitigated by using an in-game networking middleware with competent NAT traversal mechanisms. The success of the NAT traversal algorithm in the network middleware depends on a combination of factors: the consumers NAT Type, Universal Plug and Play (UPnP) support, and its port predictability.

MESSAGE AGGREGATION

Message aggregation is a technique that reduces the transmission frequency by merging information from multiple messages into the same packet. The process of aggregating more data into fewer packets reduces the overall network bandwidth usage since less network packet header information is being sent.

Packet aggregation is an essential component to optimising the server's send rate as well as the client's receive rate. Servers in either an integrated server or a dedicated server topology generally have larger packets – more data – being sent to clients.

The server has the privilege of receiving all the messages from the clients in-game, bundling them up into one packet, and sending them to all clients. The server can also intelligently remove messages deemed inappropriate for other clients; team-based messages are only sent to members of the same team.

A useful metric in determining how well the data is being aggregated is to calculate the sent payload efficiency percentage (PE%) or the ratio of in-game data versus the entire size of the packet, including network packet headers. This calculation provides the percentage of game data that exists in the packets and can signify the amount of bandwidth being used by the network packet headers:

```
  < Sent PE% = (sent game
payload data/total sent packet
size) * 100 >
```

Integrated server and dedicated server network topologies generally have clients with low payload efficiency if they are optimised to send small amounts of data frequently. Nevertheless, the developer should attempt to aggregate as much data as possible and reduce the client's packet send rate to decrease the overall bandwidth usage. Clients in heavily optimised console multiplayer games tend to offer a packet send rate near 10 packets per second.

> ***Message aggregation is a technique that reduces the transmission frequency by merging information from multiple messages into the same packet.***

The downside of aggregating more data into less packets is that it will add latency to the game since the data is not being sent as soon as it ready to go out.

The trade off between latency and bandwidth usage is a constant balancing act that any network developer must face, but there are a few techniques that can be used to lessen this problem.

UUSING LATENCY/JITTER HIDING

Client-side prediction techniques such as dead reckoning can be employed to hide latency. Employing dead reckoning using best-effort communication (UDP/IP), instead of a more expensive reliable communication (TCP/IP), will smooth over gaps when packets are lost. Thoroughly testing the game with varying latencies, packet loss, and jitter also helps to confirm the latency hiding techniques will work under poor network conditions.

Motions of jerk or sudden changes of acceleration and direction can be a game's worst enemy when making predictions based on latency.

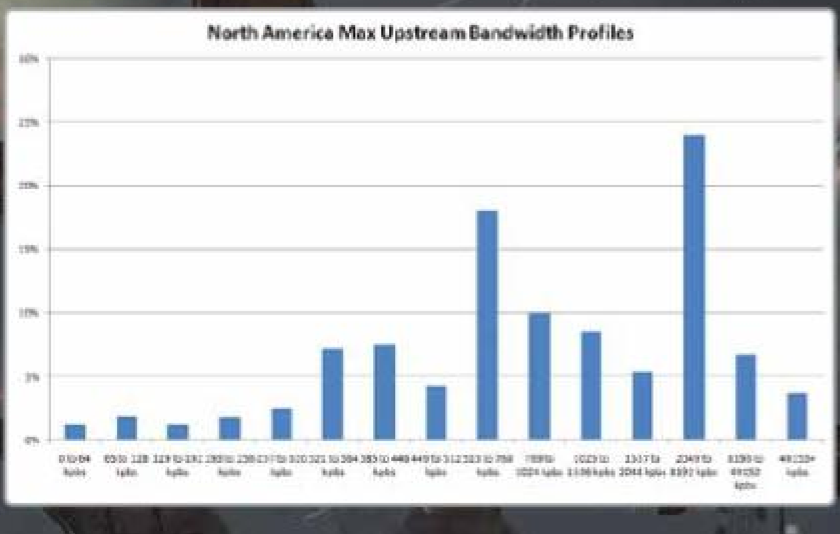
This can happen when a player is stopped, moves full burst in one direction, stops and moves full burst in another direction. Slowing game play is an effective technique that can be used to hide jerk. This can be done by adding moments of inertia to a player's movement during game play, such as between full speed start and stops.

SENDING LESS RELIABLE TRAFFIC

Data in-game can be sent via unreliable (UDP) or reliable (Reliable UDP, or TCP) network protocols. Unreliable data is traffic that is sent best effort. If the unreliable data is lost on the network it will not reach its destination. When traffic is sent reliably, an additional sequence number must be sent with the data. Once the reliable data has been received, an acknowledgement must be sent to the sender to signify that the data was obtained.

If a host does not receive an acknowledgement, it must retransmit the data over the network and wait again for a returned acknowledgement. Data flagged to be sent reliably requires additional memory since the data must be kept until it has been acknowledged, in case it needs to be resent over the network.

BANDWIDTH UPSTREAM PROFILE: NORTH AMERICA



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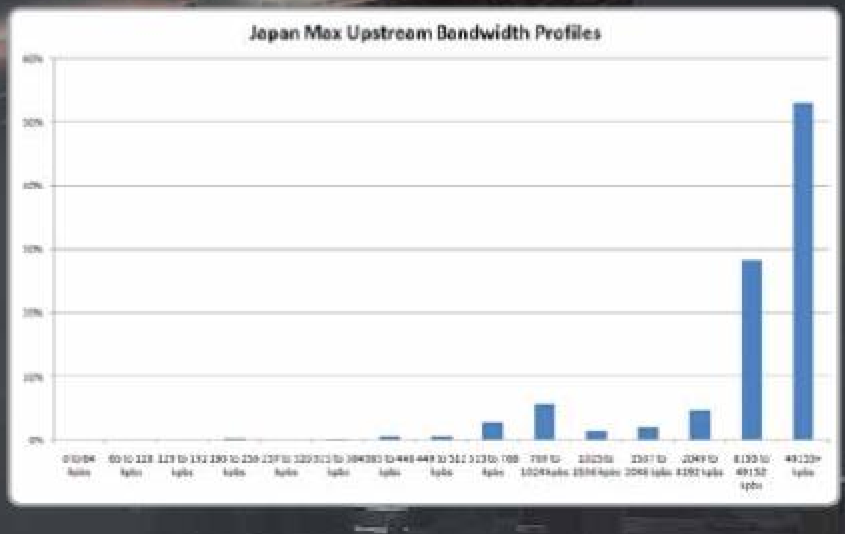
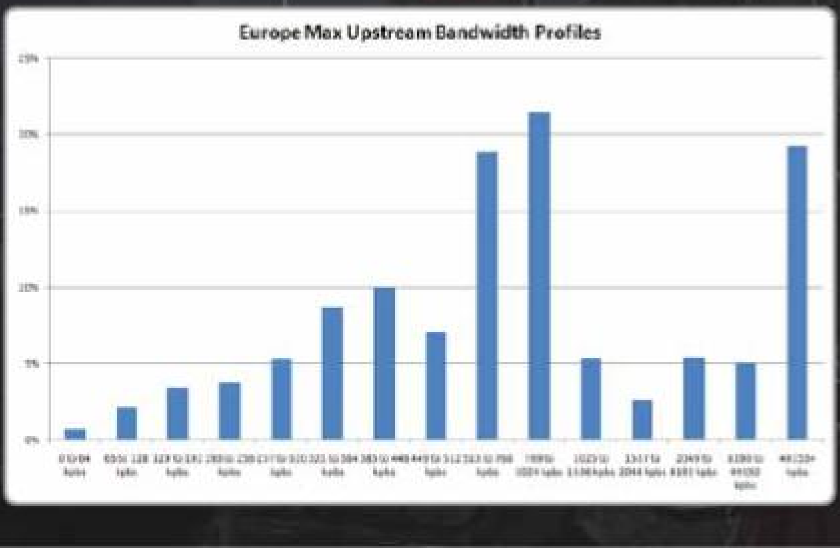
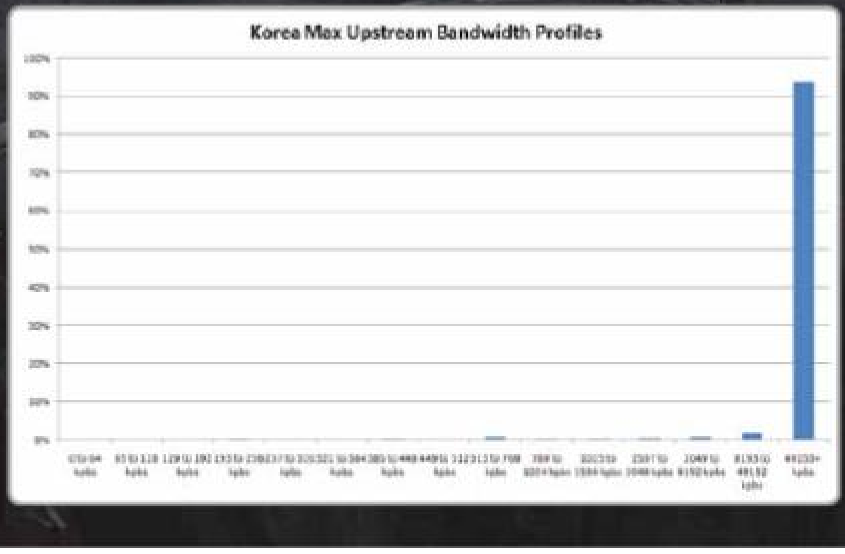


BANDWIDTH UPSTREAM PROFILE: EUROPE



BANDWIDTH UPSTREAM PROFILE: KOREA



Above: Bandwidth profiles of clients of Sony's PlayStation online environment (see main article)

The added bandwidth expense of sending reliable traffic when packet loss exists, and the increased buffer space required to keep unacknowledged data, are the primary costs of sending reliable traffic on a game console. Generally, it is best practice to send as little reliable traffic as possible, but this can directly affect how a game synchronises its simulation across the network.

A new developer may consider various techniques to synchronise gameplay over the network. One possible solution is to send the raw (controller) input data from a client to all the other remote clients in the game. This input data would be used to drive that player's actions on each remote client. Another (probably better) approach is to synchronise the state of all the local game objects across the network. For example, a player's avatar can be considered a game object, and when the player moves his local player character, the remote player character is updated with the current state (or position) of the character.

Sending input data is simple to implement; however, it is an expensive way to synchronise a game across a network since controller data cannot be missed or retrieved out-of-order. The input data must be sent reliably and in order for a remote game to accurately simulate another player's activity. Network traffic that represents the stateful information of network objects may include attributes such as position, orientation, or events, such as firing a weapon or completing an objective. Most real-time games choose to send stateful data instead of input data because it is a flexible solution. For example, stateful data, such as position and orientation updates, do not need to be sent reliably since only the latest update is the most pertinent.

A network game where all data needs to be guaranteed (it is 100 per cent reliable) is considered a bandwidth expensive game. Such a game will not support high player counts. Player position and orientation data is almost always sent via unreliable network transport, which means that each client must handle the possibility of this data not arriving in time, out of order, or not at all.

PICKING YOUR TARGET BANDWITH RATE

Picking a target bandwidth rate can be a tricky, yet important part of launching a successful online game. For example, in an Integrated Server topology the server is running on one of the participants in-game. One client in the game will need to support the high send and receive rates of the Integrated Server. Picking the target bandwidth rate of a game title's Integrated Server can be difficult to do without knowing how consumer bandwidth penetrations vary within each country.

At PlayStation, any game that employs an integrated server topology will attempt to benchmark each client's bandwidth profile before determining which client will be chosen as the server. The PlayStation online environment has recorded the bandwidth profiles of clients in each territory (North America, Europe, Japan and Korea), which are detailed in the graphs featured at the top of this page.

The graphs feature the percentage of users and their respective maximum upstream bandwidth profiles in each country. The statistics were collected from January 8th, 2010 to July 27th, 2010, using the following PlayStation 3 titles: *Warhawk*, *Fat Princess*, *Grand Turismo 5 Prologue*, and *Pain*. The graphs for North America and Europe are the most useful compared to Japan or Korea where most consumers have 50Mbps or higher Internet connections available.

CONCLUSION

Many aspects must be considered when designing a multiplayer game to accommodate the varying gameplay requirements, game synchronisation techniques, and connection qualities of the consumer. Bandwidth optimisation is the key component in that process.

The type of game and its sensitivity to latency and jitter directly affects the options available for lower bandwidth consumption. I hope the network optimisation techniques mentioned in this article help to illustrate and provide solutions for some of the major issues and tradeoffs that exist when implementing a real-time online game.

Vinod Tandon is a staff applications development engineer at Sony Computer Entertainment America's Online Technology Group. He has worked with first-party developers and producers on a wide array of networking problems and issues regarding online gaming.

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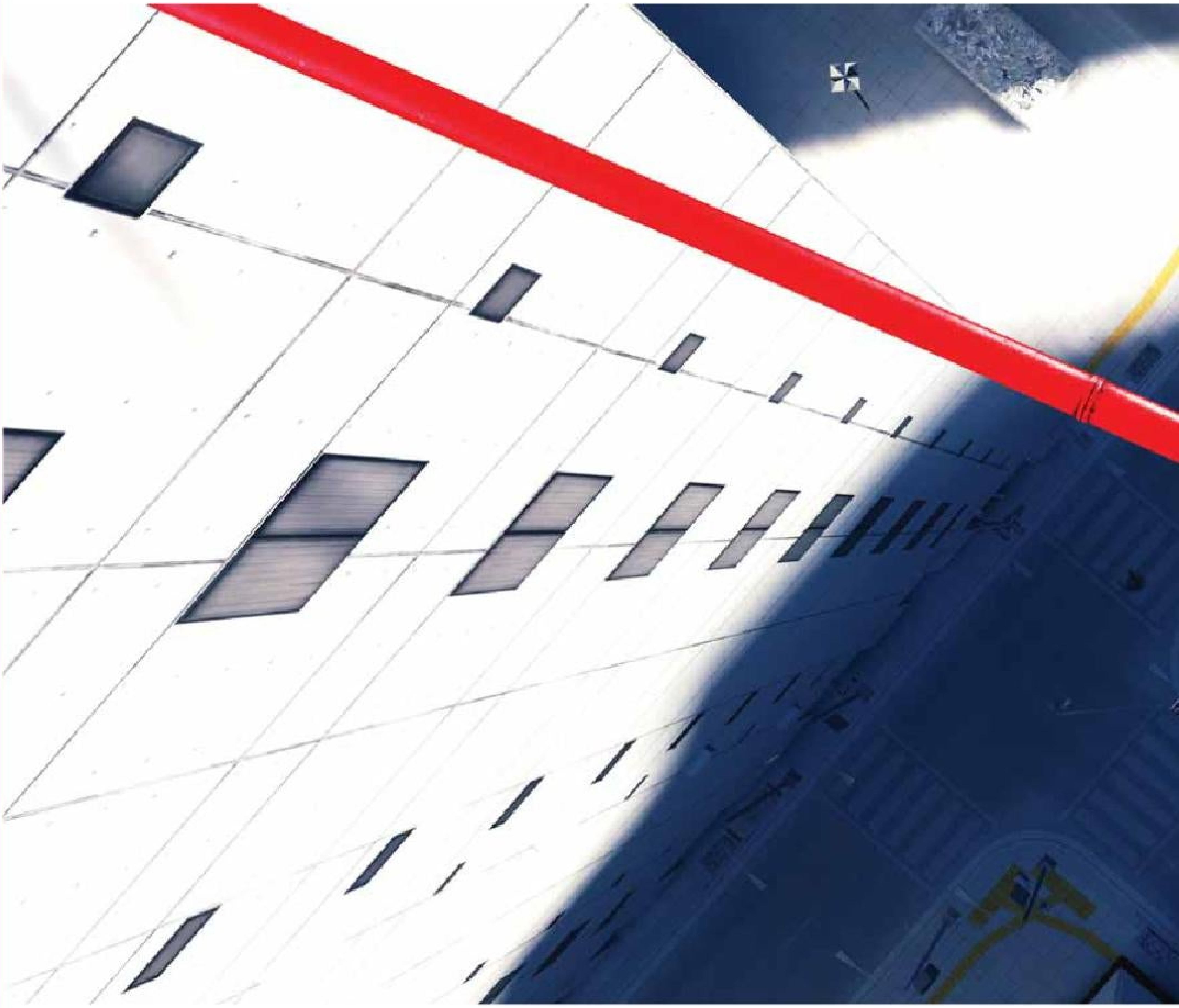
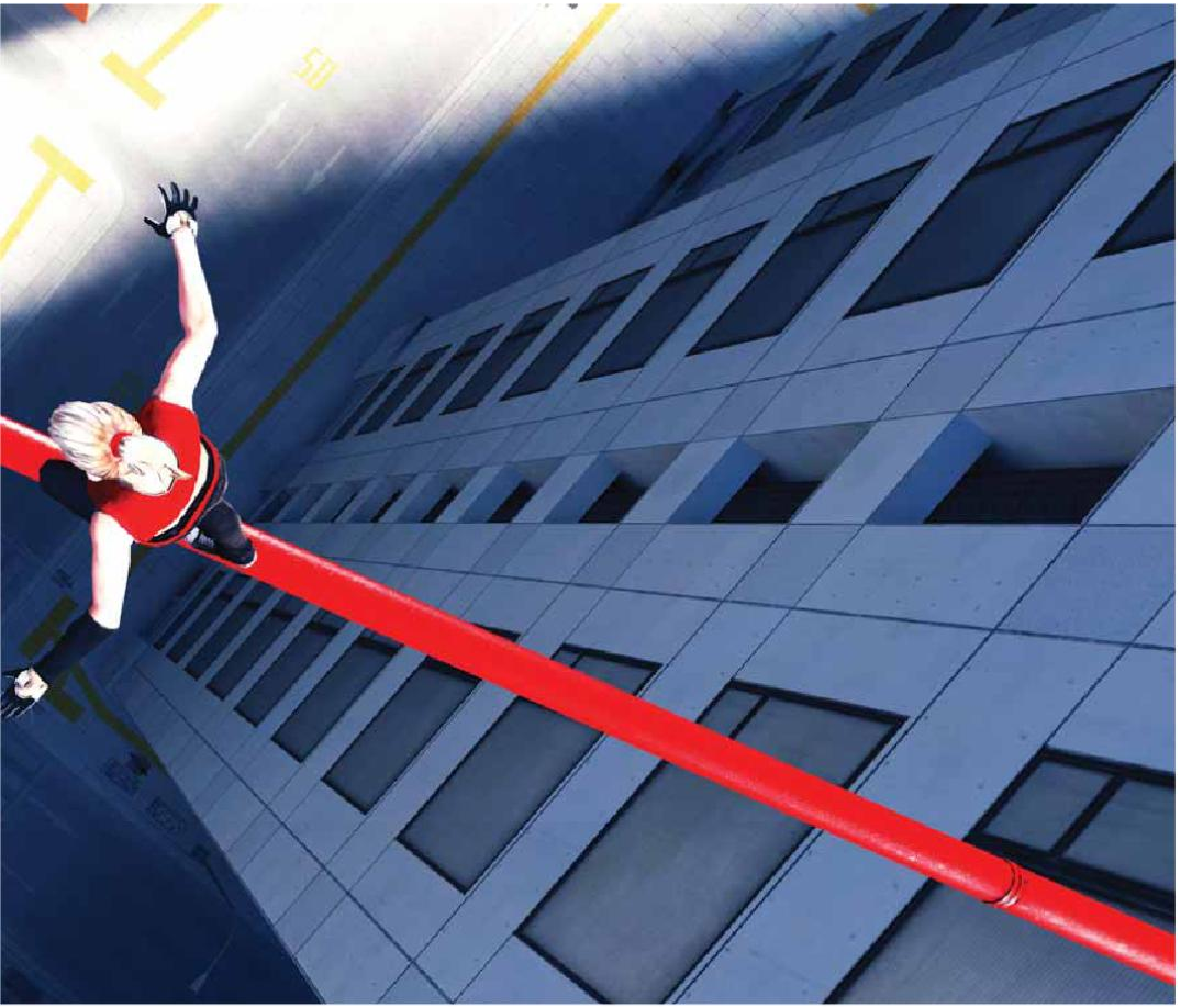


Duncan Harris presents the first in an ongoing series looking at specially captured screenshots that showcase game art at its best…



Mirror's Edge

Good girl gone bad Celeste enjoys the high life in *Mirror's Edge* – or maybe she's just admiring the paintwork. Think what you like of the story and gameplay, but DICE achieved its goal of making an unmistakable visual experience. The bleached city, ultra-realistic shaders and groundbreaking use of colour – not to mention Illuminate Labs' Beast global lighting system – make this a world that begs to be reached out and touched. Perfect, in other words, for such a daring attempt at first-person platforming.

Tools and tricks for this screenshot include an edited config file unlocking the game's free flight debug camera, Unreal Engine's high-res tiledshot function, an FOV/aspect ratio hack by Racer_S of the Widescreen Gaming Forums, and a memory-resident trainer with slow motion cheat.

Dead End Thrills is a website and resource dedicated to the art of video games. It believes this art is too easily overlooked thanks to factors including technology, design and the 'fast food culture' of modern play. Its galleries feature over 5,500 lovingly taken, watermark-free screenshots which are free to download and use. Elsewhere, it features interviews with today's leading artists and designers.
www.deadendthrills.com

Studio: Digital Illusions
Publisher: EA
Year: 2008/9
Capture format: PC

PLAYSTATION 3
MIRROR'S EDGE
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EA

The test of the Best

When Testology opened the doors of its new compliance facility, it made sure it got things right. **Will Freeman** finds out how…

Above: The Testology team strike a pose with managing director Andy Robson, centre

When Testology established its compliance facility it was something of an inevitability for the long-experienced testing and QA firm. As a company focused intently on customer satisfaction, the development of the compliance offering was essential in realising Testology's vision of delivering an all-encompassing and unrivalled service.

"We want to be able to offer a complete QA service," explains Testology MD Andy Robson. "We have excelled in the functionality and consultancy sectors in recent years and felt it time to translate the same excellence into compliance. Expanding, while maintaining the same level of quality, was a natural progression because of our ability to recruit the very best compliance technicians."

Developers and publishers have in fact always approached Testology with compliance enquiries, but the team at the Hampshire outfit wanted, with certainty, to be able to offer the highest possible level of service in that capacity before opening the doors on a dedicated facility.

Now that time has come, and Testology is the creator of a new, specialised and experienced department.

FIRST TIME FOR EVERYTHING

Born of a meticulous recruitment process, the highly-qualified compliance department at Testology has embraced the dedication to 'first time passes' that has long made the firm's other QA and testing services perennially popular with a host of high-profile developers.

"With such a successful QA and consultancy department, we have ensured that our new departments provide the same level of excellence," states Robson. "The appeal lies in Testology's dedication to quality, our employees' passionate approach to every task and project, and the compliance department's level of developmental experience. We have all the required tools, software, hardware, and peripherals that are needed to run through specific compliance checks. Moreover we have the skill and knowledge to use them correctly against the compliance check."

To that end Testology has appointed an extremely experienced veteran in QA manager Justin Amore. He will oversee the outfit, calling on his wealth of knowledge of the compliance process to ensure that the expectation of quality Testology delivers on will be translated into the new department.

> ***"With such a successful QA and consultancy department, we have ensured that our new departments provide the same level of excellence."***
>
> Andy Robson, Testology

"We have assembled a compliance team that has a proven track record of getting titles through submission first time, on all platforms," confirms Amore. "Our compliance team has a full and comprehensive understanding of all Sony, Nintendo and Microsoft compliance standards, are well-versed in all the required testing tools and boast the skills to replicate the platform holders testing environment.

"We have the experience and capabilities to make a title as compliant as possible, making us supremely confident that our client's titles will have a strong chance of passing first time."

Certain that its experience in testing is unparalleled, Testology boasts an impressive portfolio of past clients, including Lionhead Studios; something that has given it the kind of experience it can leverage in its compliance role.

"Our staffs' careers have been defined by award-winning titles, allowing expectations for our 'testing departments' to be translated into quality compliance," states Robson, who is fiercely proud of what his company and workforce have achieved. "Testing and compliance share the same goal to assure quality. Our functionality teams and compliance teams all work towards that same level of excellence."

ONTO A WINNER

This year Testology's effort in raising the bar in the QA sector was recognised with a Develop Award. The Best Services accolade was accepted on stage to a level of applause typical of that reserved for big name developers, demonstrating how popular Testology has become with its client base. That fact hasn't bred complacency though, and Testology is acutely aware of the industry's fickle nature.

"Reputations are fragile," confirms Robson. "They can sway depending on the quality of service. We are 100 per cent committed to maintaining our excellent reputation and record with customers in the future, including within our compliance department. Our reputation and record support our decision to expand and offer the industry even more quality services within our areas of expertise."

To demonstrate its confidence in its compliance service, Testology is now offering its first five clients a 25 per cent discount, marking a generous reduction on what the firm insists is an immensely competitive rate. Those people interested in Testology's compliance services, or in any of the QA services it can offer, can contact Robson directly at **arobson@testology.co.uk**. **www.testology.co.uk**

This piece replaces an erroneous article about Testology published last month by Develop. Apologies for any confusion caused.

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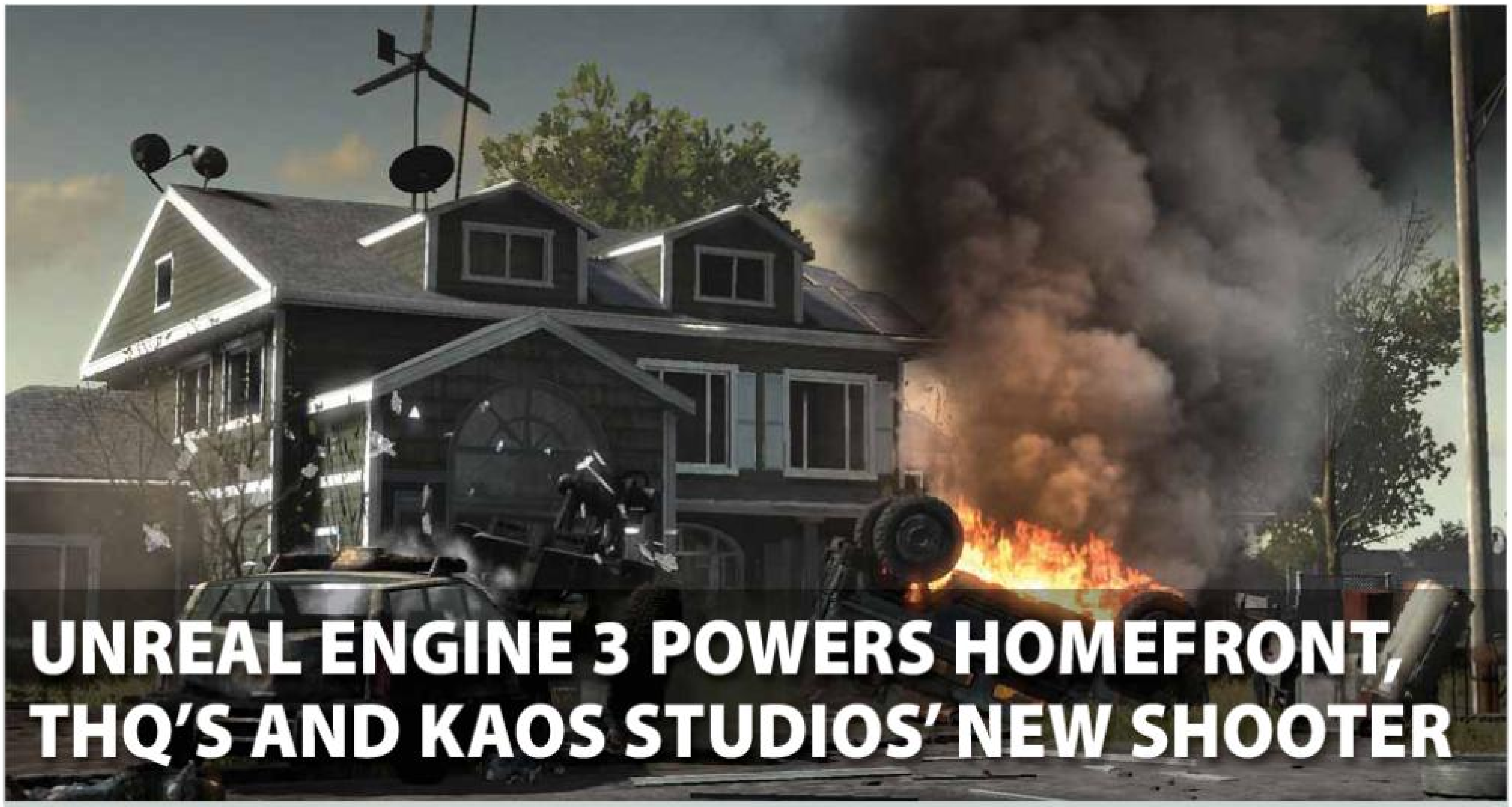

Above: The new shooter, Homefront, from THQ and Kaos Studios uses Unreal Engine 3

UNREAL ENGINE 3 POWERS HOMEFRONT, THQ'S AND KAOS STUDIOS' NEW SHOOTER

In *Homefront* from THQ, North Korea has occupied the United States in 2027 after a series of ripped-from-the-headlines political happenings. It's within this nightmare scenario that a band of freedom fighters takes the war to the enemy stronghold in San Francisco.

THQ-owned Kaos Studios recently elaborated on using the Unreal Engine to bring this near-future America in ruins to life for gamers on PC, Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3. Like Kaos Studios' last game, *Frontlines: Fuel of War*, the Manhattan-based studio built this new shooter using Unreal Engine 3 technology.

"We chose Unreal Engine 3 for *Frontlines* because we were starting our studio and wanted to get the product out within two-and-a-half years," explained Dave Votypka, design director, Kaos Studios.

"Using Epic's tech, so we could focus on building our content, fitted into THQ's strategy. Unreal allowed us to hit the ground running."

Votypka said that it was nice to have the Unreal Editor and tools on day one. His team has extended its Unreal Engine 3 technological foundation by adding features like light map streaming and different types of tone mapping.

One of the things Kaos Studios has benefited from since Epic released *Unreal Tournament 3* on PlayStation 3 is the ability to create *Homefront* from the ground up as a cross-console title.

Votypka said that Epic has provided excellent support for the Unreal Engine on PS3, allowing his team to develop the Xbox 360 and PS3 versions of the game.

The programmers on his team have been keeping up with the latest updates through the Unreal Developer Network, which allows them to converse with not only Epic, but other Unreal licensees.

During development of this massive new game, which features an epic single-player campaign and an intense multiplayer experience, the team was able to use Unreal Engine tools to bring the war-ravaged American landscape to life.

"As a player runs through this ravaged world, things happen, and we create those dramatic moments using Kismet triggers," explained Votypka.

"We were able to use Matinee, for example, when you're running through a fire scene in a strip mall parking lot and North Koreans are firing at you. When the car blows over you, nearly decapitating you, that's a Matinee piece. We also used Matinee with our mo-cap scenes and authored a lot of our in-game cinematic and storytelling moments using that toolset."

Votypka said *Homefront* will feature online combat on par with the 50-player battlefield chaos from *Frontlines*, replete with flying and ground-based vehicles.

"We're continuing in the large-scale warfare footsteps of *Frontlines*," said Votypka. "We built the foundation for large-scale warfare in multiplayer using the Unreal Engine, so for *Homefront* we hit the ground running. We've focused on polishing and iteration, as opposed to just getting helicopters and tanks working in the engine."

"The places you lived and grew up in have been twisted by this North Korean occupation that occurred after an energy crisis and a financial collapse," explained Votypka.

"We wanted to make that familiar landscape alien. We wanted to explore what would happen if the world's most powerful country was under occupation and what it would be like to fight within that world."

Players will be able to defend America in the first chapter of a transmedia experience that also includes a web-based documentary and a Sci-Fi Channel TV movie.

Thanks to Kaos Studios for speaking with freelance reporter John Gaudiosi for this story.

UPCOMING EPIC ATTENDED EVENTS:

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Please email: mrein@epicgames.com for appointments.

To discuss anything raised in this column or general licensing opportunities for Epic Games' *Unreal* engine, contact: **mrein@epicgames.com**

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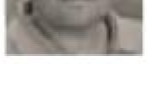
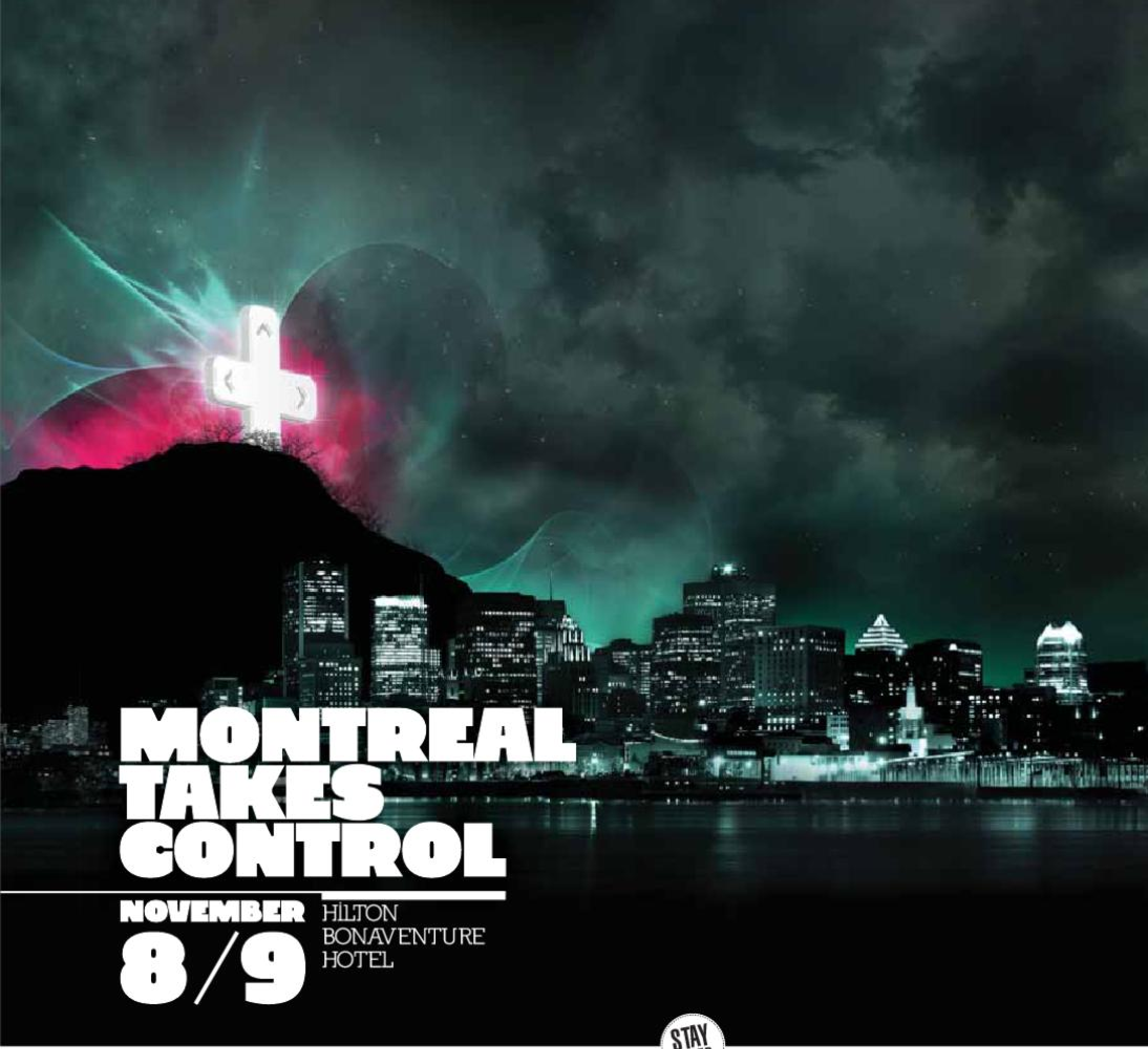


Mark Rein is vice president and co-founder of Epic Games based in Cary, North Carolina. Epic's Unreal Engine 3 won *Game Developer's* Best Engine Front Line Award four times, won three Develop Industry Excellence Awards and is also a Hall of Fame inductee. Epic's own titles include the *Gears of War*, *Unreal Tournament 3* and *Gears of War 3*. **www.epicgames.com**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Care In The Community

Should the audio sector take responsibility for the ignorance it often faces from other sectors of the game development community? **John Broomhall** dares to wonder…

For my money, this year's Develop conference audio track provided yet another candid, informative and thought provoking set of talks.

Thanks to all the speakers, not just for their time and effort, but also for their attitude; a generous willingness to share from deep seams of experience wrought at the production coal-face – not just the successes, but the failures too. 'Let me tell you how we got it wrong so you can avoid the same pitfalls'.

And not just what's been done to date either, but also revelations of future directions, fresh ideas and new thinking. Brilliant. This liberal dissemination of best practice and future practice can only be good for the overall advancement of excellence in game audio.

So why do people come and speak in this munificent way? Cynics might suggest self-promotion. Or perhaps these people have too much time on their hands?

Absolutely not. The fact is they're passionate about game audio – whether sound designer, sound coder, composer, dialogue producer or audio manager. They actually care very much about what they do, get a buzz from working in the video games business, and love to share their passion and knowledge with people of a like mind.

All that actually characterises our entire game audio community. If you subscribe to the VGM email forum, which to a great extent envelops this community, you'll know exactly what I mean.

HELPING HANDS

Day-after-day, game audio people around the world, from junior to executive, reach out to help each other, freely offering focused, time-saving and even disaster-averting advice – not to mention some mildly disturbing humour.

This same spirit was much in evidence in the audio track's final 'town hall' style session, with numerous people around the room making valuable contributions to the discussion. Again, the sharing thing.

Unsurprisingly, a lack of understanding from other game development disciplines was cited several times as a root of working woes and unwelcome pressures in audio land. Talk of producers and technical and creative leads that apparently don't 'get' sound had a few people reaching for their voodoo dolls. Then there was the old chestnut that discussions like these raise and address the right issues – but that the people who really need to hear them aren't present.

Above: The audio track at Develop conference earlier this year provided some thought- provoking sessions

My own experience has always been that, in reality, we have to proactively take our message to those we want to influence. There are fundamental non-project-specific structure and process issues that need tackling to ensure audio and its practitioners are given due consideration. There are also rolling project-specific areas where pro-active engagement is vital. Arguably, we are like the vulnerable motorcyclist having to drive not only for ourselves, but also for all the other car drivers, continually anticipating that they won't have seen us. All of which brings me to the Taylor factor.

> ***"Any of us could come up with a structured presentation which underlines the importance of music, sound and dialogue to the gaming experience and highlight the negative effects of dodgy scheduling."***

PRESENT AND CORRECT

I interviewed SCEE's Garry Taylor for another publication shortly before *Develop*. In passing, he mentioned that the Creative Services Group at Sony run 'producer workshops' on audio in games; a term that to my ears, has a pleasing ring about it. It may be a simple enough premise but I bet they do it very well. I also bet any one of us could come up with a structured presentation for producers which underlines the importance of music, sound and dialogue to the gaming experience and in particular highlights the negative effects of dodgy scheduling and unrealistic expectations of the audio department. Clearly there is zero point in lurking in our studios feeling isolated and unloved. Even though spending hours commiserating with audio colleagues about problem issues may be therapeutic – and fun – in reality, it gets nothing changed.

Rightly or wrongly, isn't it us who need to initiate the engagement and commence dialogue, carefully defining problem issues in a focused way and proposing practical solutions? We need to understand and take account of the headaches other disciplines face and make sure that, in turn, they understand our workflow, key dependencies and production timelines – and of course, the huge bang for the buck that great audio brings to the party. As all readers of this column will know, it even makes the pictures look better.

Winning support from senior management for your bespoke equivalent of 'producer workshops' would obviously be ideal – with mandatory attendance. And why not suggest that every new recruit to your company has some sort of induction class on audio? However, if 'corporatising' such an activity is unrealistic in your situation, perhaps a guerrilla-style approach could do the trick just as well. You might just improve your own working life and the quality of audio that gets published in your game. And if all of us did it, we might just improve the whole industry.

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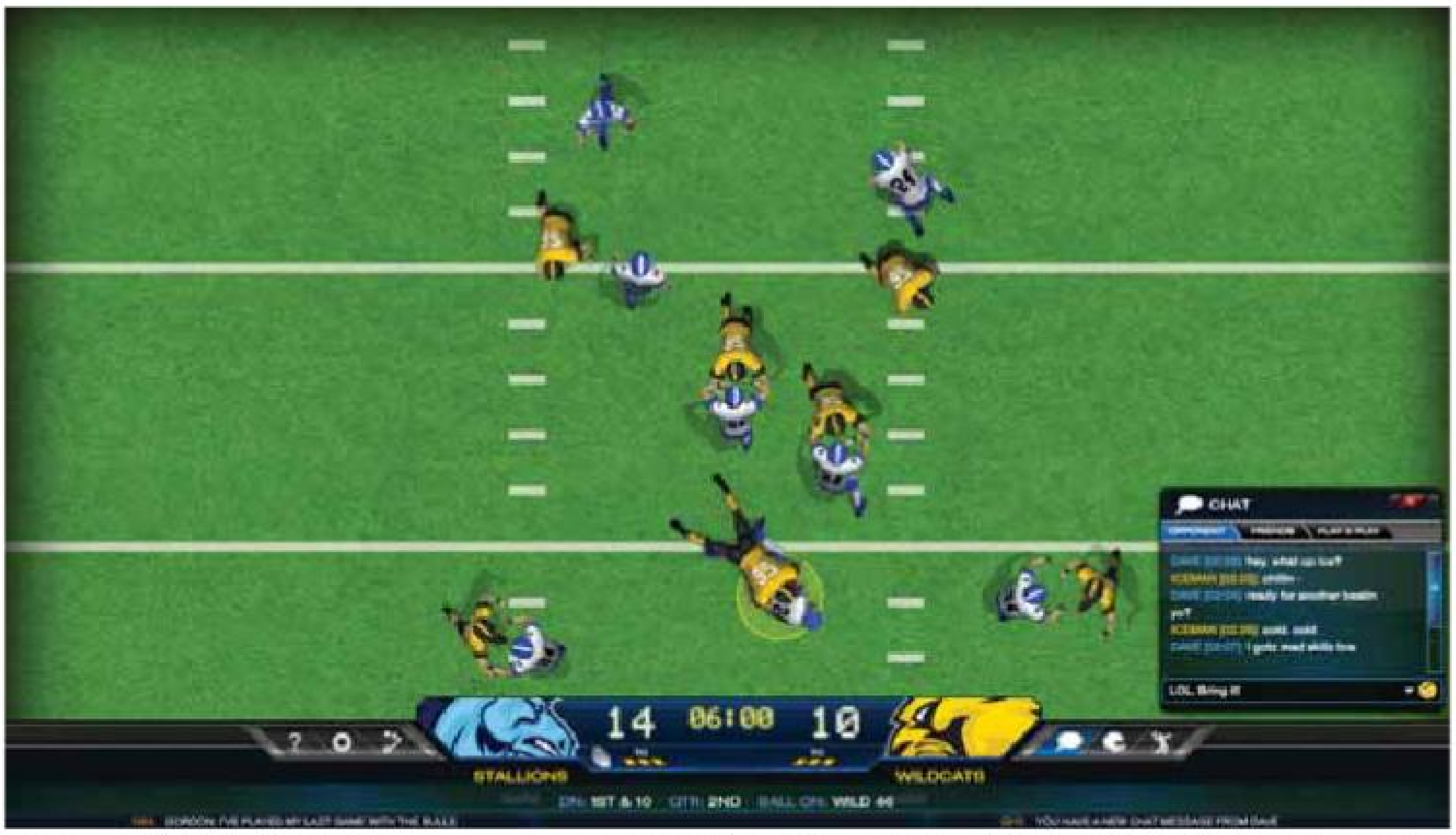
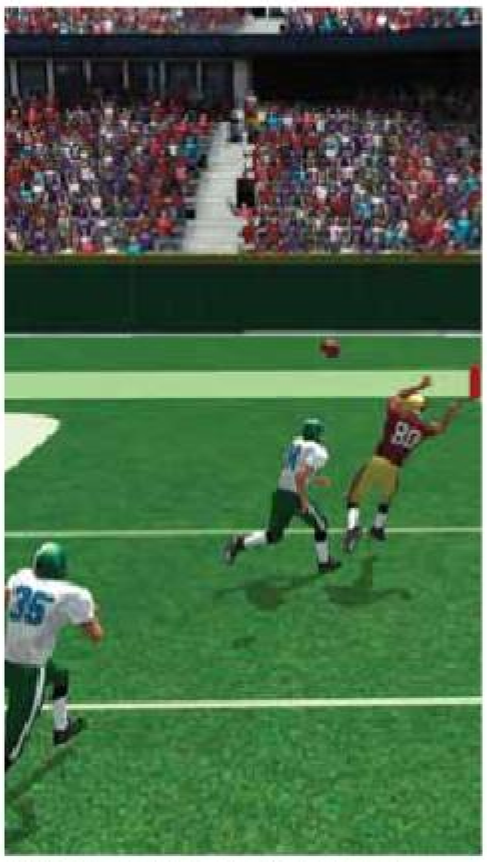
UNITYFOCUS

Using **Unity** to create premium social games

Thomas Grové looks at how Quickhit Football's pay-to-play upgrade harnesses the power of Unity, and speaks to the studio working directly with the National Football League…





Quickhit Football is among a number of high profile launches this month that are using Unity to deliver a premium 3D web experience.

The title launched last year with a free-to-play Flash version and levelled up for this year's season by introducing a premium version authored in Unity – and scored the coveted NFL licence for good measure. Notably, players of both the free-to-play Flash version and the pay-to-play Unity version will be able to compete against each other.

Trevor Stricker, director of game development for *Quickhit*, explains more about the relationship between the versions, and the role Unity played.

What are your goals for Quickhit Football?

Quickhit Football makes it fun to see how different passing plays work, or how to mould your team into a potent running threat. When the NFL season starts, you have the people who casually follow a team, and then you have fans with boundless attention for everything happening in the league.

That's the great thing about football – it has broad appeal. Our goal is to be a game that all American football fans enjoy playing with each other that doesn't require you to have an expensive console or the thumb dexterity of a 12-year-old.

Equally important is what it's not; it's are not a button mashing game, and it's not a game for people looking to show off their new HDTVs. There's a long history of football games in this space, from *NFL 2K* to *Madden* to *Backbreaker*, that fans have to choose from.

Why did you decide to create a premium version in Unity?

Flash is great for getting your game out to a huge base of players without requiring an install. We have had lots of success with our flash version. But, at *Quickhit* we are creating an amazing game and we didn't want to be limited by one platform. We had to make our graphics fairly blocky in order to have enough room for all 22 players we draw on the field.

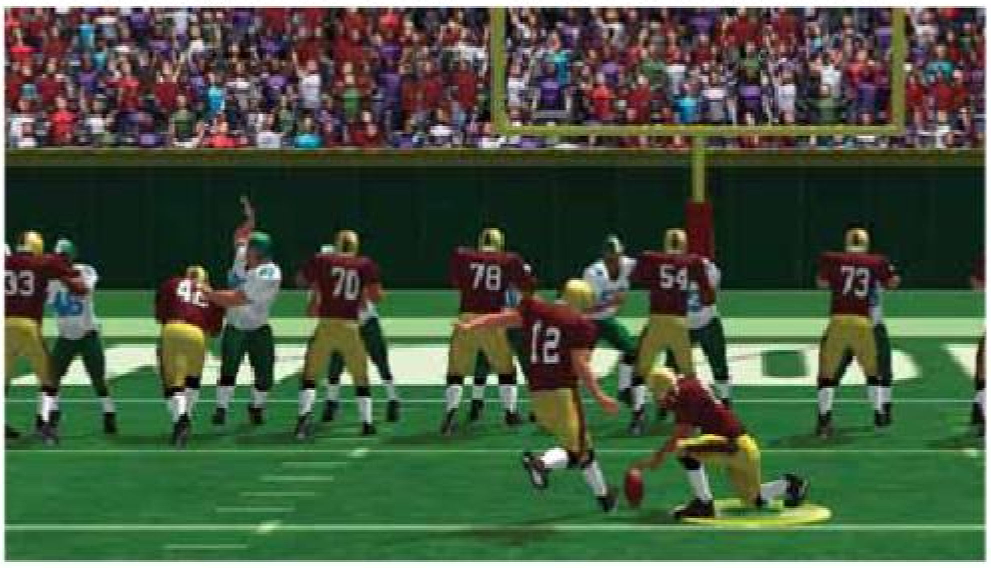
We had to ditch things like giving each player a unique number. We would love to display more information about what's happening as the play unfolds, but we can't draw any more in Flash if we want to run on older systems. We have a large number of players who love the game we've built, but we want to make the experience as immersive as a game of this calibre can be.

With Unity we don't need to make those compromises. You can see the linebacker wrap his arms around a receiver trying to get away from him. Every player can have his own number. You can watch gameplay from various camera angles. And yet, we're still running in the browser. The quality of the experience is going to wow people.

What's unique about your business model?

We will always have a free version of the game and the ability for user to earn rewards through gameplay. With Unity, we are taking it to the next level by giving users the option of a better experience. A good analogy is TV. Broadcast television is free and a lot of people like it and watch it, but people upgrade because they want HBO.

To my knowledge, a premium tier to a free game has not been attempted in this way before. We want to give our users a compelling reason to upgrade. We are trying to do something more substantial than just adding fuzzy hats or tinted glasses to your avatar.



Do you see what you're doing as setting a trend for the industry?

Social games are evolving into more compelling experiences, which is a trend *Quickhit* certainly falls into. Millions of people are spending lots of time playing social games. While some in the industry are still sticking their nose up at the idea of Facebook or free-to-play games, a lot of us see it as a new frontier. There is a lot of learning taking place – players are discovering there are more compelling things than a grind, and developers are learning how to engage a player a whole lot sooner.

Our team has substantial credibility from games like *Madden*, *NFL 2K*, and *NBA 2K*. Considering there's a certain lead designer from the *Civilization* franchise, of all things, now making social games, we're clearly not alone. I think the future holds a lot more social games from huge publishers and independent developers.

www.quickhit.com

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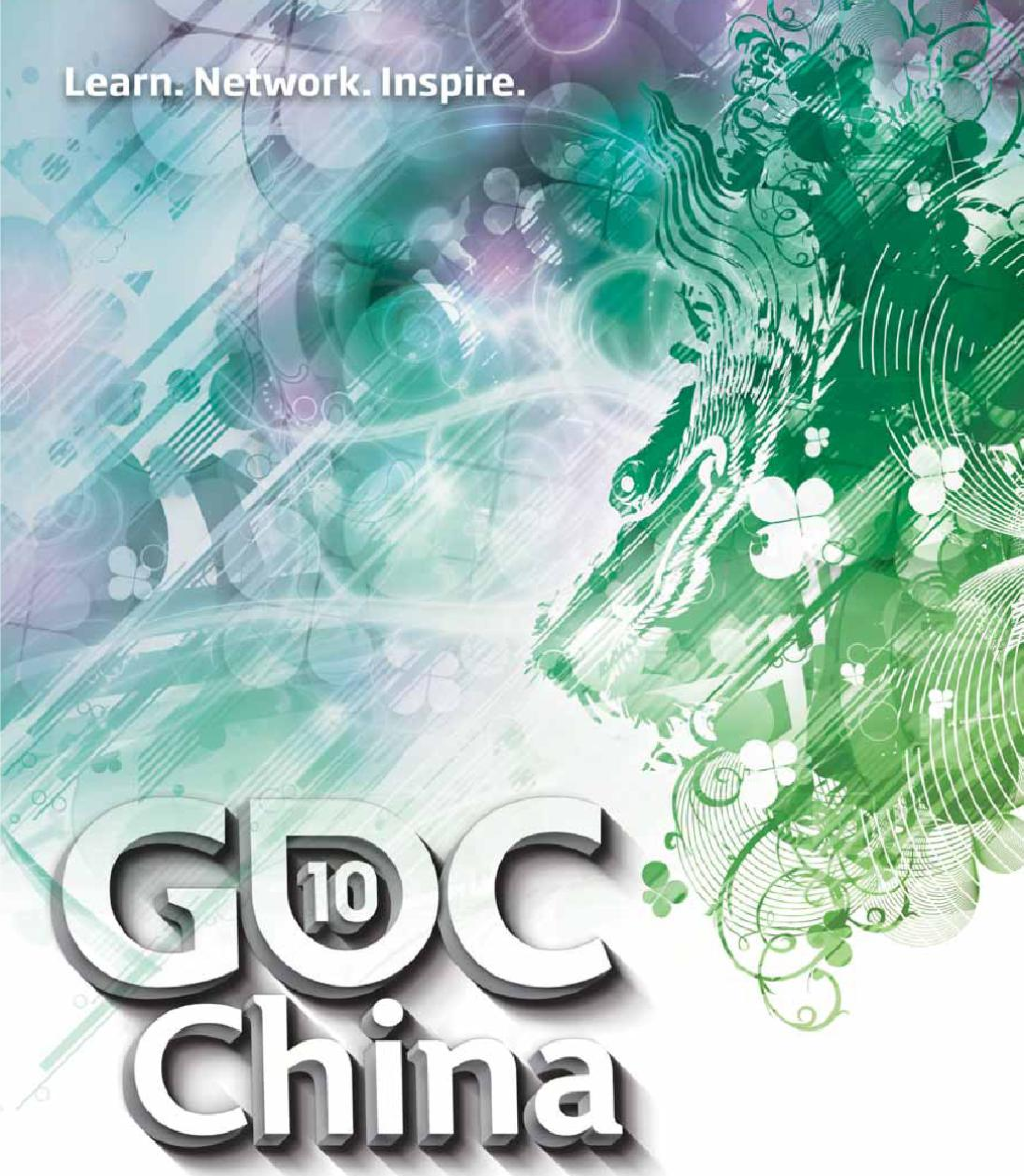
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PEOPLE:
Former LucasArts boss moves to Republic of Fun
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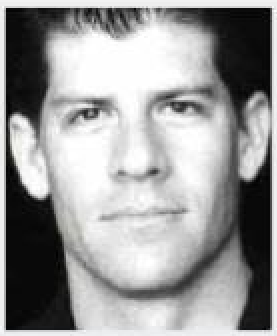

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Studio News

This month: Lightning Fish, Republic of Fun and Chunk…

Four new staff have joined Lightning Fish's expanded business in India.

Assuming the role of studio manager from Gameloft, Varun Gupta has a masters in business administration and over four years' industry experience in the roles of producer and project manager.

Simon Prytherch, CEO, commented: "The role of studio manager at the Pune studio is key to the success of the studio and the Lightning Fish Games organisation overall. I am pleased to welcome Varun to Lightning Fish Games, it is good to have his skills and experience within the company."

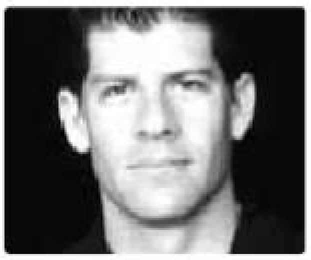
Farman Ul Haque, a graduate in multimedia from New Delhi, joins Lightning Fish Games from Zoom, one of India's best entertainment channels. Farman will lead the team of motion editors at the Pune Studio.

Ul Haque said: "I am very pleased to be working with such a technically astute company as Lightning Fish Games, and look forward to bringing my skills and experience to the products developed by the company."

Ranbeer Singh Hora joins Lightning Fish Games from Gameshastra Solutions, with over five years' games industry QA experience, and will lead the QA function in Pune Studio. Singh Hora commented: "I have a real passion for games in general, and really like what Lightning Fish Games are bringing to the industry."

Gaurav Kumar will be leading the art team at the Pune Studio, and brings over four years' experience to the role. Prytherch said: "We have established a great core team in Pune, and they will be the foundation stone from which we will develop the studio."

www.lightningfish.com



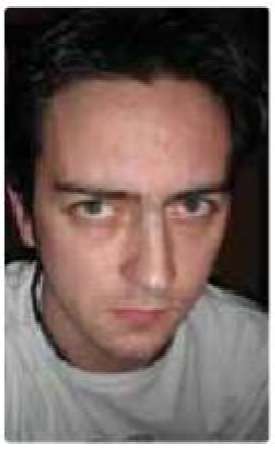
The short-serving president of LucasArts has joined social games publisher Republic of Fun.

In May Darrell Rodriguez resigned from his position at the studio, reportedly along with several members of his executive team, having served just under two years at the respected company.

"Social gaming is one of the biggest drivers of the explosive growth in social media and Republic of Fun is getting it right by empowering the people that are passionate about games to have a say in which games that they get to play," said Rodriguez.

"I feel privileged to join this exciting and dynamic team and look forward to working with Mike and the board during the next phase of the company's growth."

www.repfun.com



Glasgow-based digital creative agency Chunk is to launch a dedicated games company, with former Denki developer Stewart Hogarth spearheading the new division.

Chunk has made games in the past, as part of its remit as a digital creative agency, and has scored game deals with the likes of Channel 4, the BBC and car manufacturers.

"The guys here have been really receptive to my slightly off-the-wall method of game development, and I really appreciate that," Hogarth said.

"At the moment we're in the process of defining the types of games we'd like to make. Although we'll still make branded games, we'll also make our own independent games too. We're happy to turn our hand to any style, but there are certain key ingredients and a level of overall quality that we'll inject into all our games, which we hope we will become recognised for."

Hogarth will also soon be contributing his own *Develop* blog posts, discussing the ups and downs of indie development.

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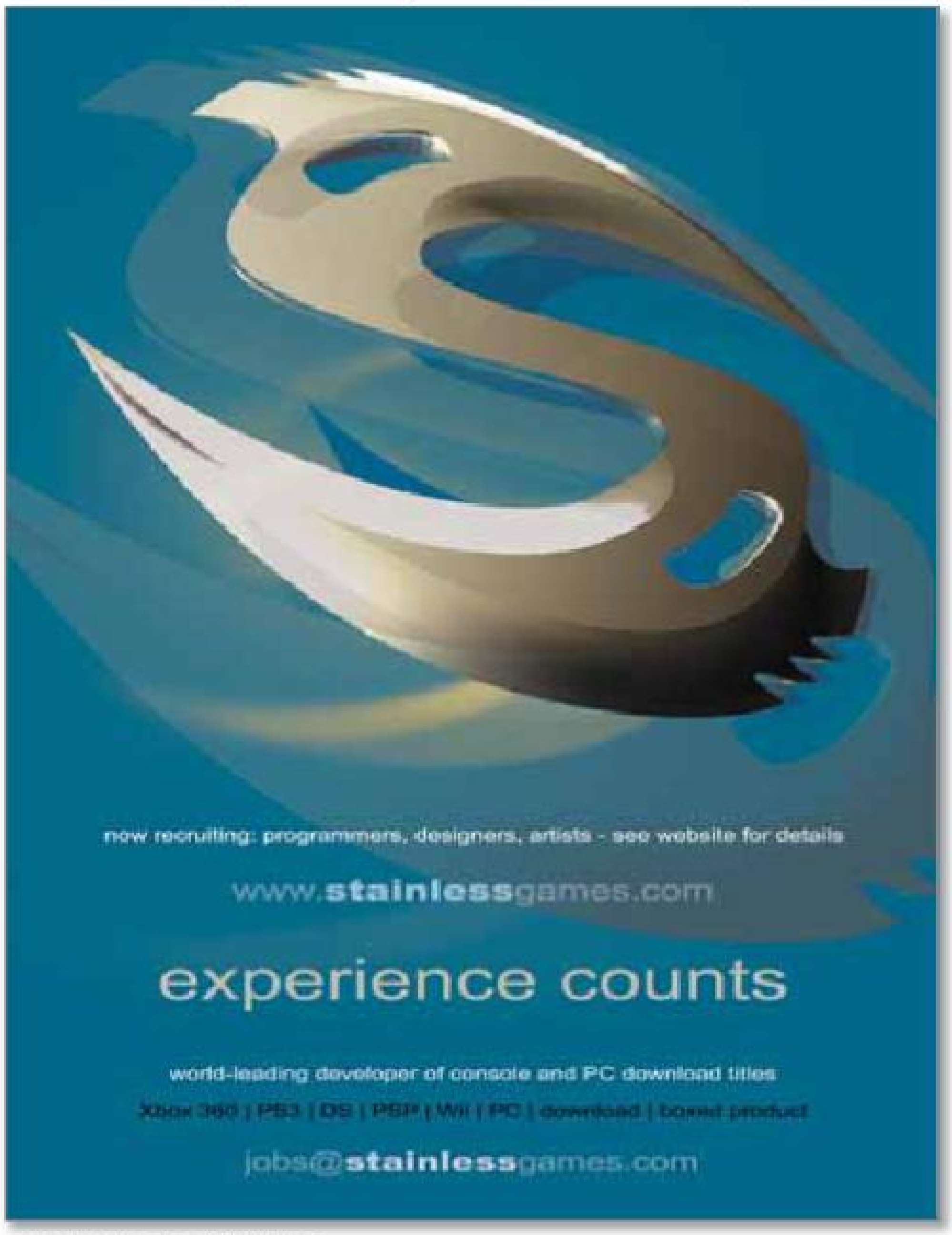

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Studio Spotlight

ROCKSTEADY STUDIOS

Founded in 2004 from the ashes of Argonaut, Rocksteady Studios is based in a converted factory in Highgate, North London. Headed up by co-founders Sefton Hill, game director, and Jamie Walker, studio director, as well as former-Eidos owner Anthony Price, non-executive, it received a sturdy cash infusion from SCi in 2005 that saw the later take a sizable stake in Rocksteady, which has released two titles to date.

The first, *Urban Chaos: Riot Response*, was released in May 2006 for PS2 and Xbox. The game was the conclusion of a previous FPS begun at Argonaut called *Roll Call*. It was published by Eidos Interactive and received a positive overall critical response, establishing Rocksteady as a studio to watch in the future.

For the following three years Rocksteady worked quietly on what would become *Batman: Arkham Asylum*. This project emerged as a defining game for Rocksteady and the Batman licence in video games in general. It took an impressive £15.26m at retail sales in the UK alone.

A third-person action-adventure set on the island of Arkham Asylum, the second Rocksteady title distilled the best elements of modern gaming and added several impressive new ideas of its own. It went on to win a string of noted awards including GDC Awards for Best Writing, Best Game Design and Game of the Year, and the Develop Awards gong for Best Use of a Licence or IP. It also became a Guiness World Record holder as the most critically acclaimed superhero game ever.

The resounding success of *Arkham Asylum* lead to Rocksteady being bought by the owners of the Batman IP, Warner Bros., with Square Enix Europe retaining a 25.1 per cent company stake. After the purchase, Rocksteady immedietly began work on *Batman: Arkham City*, a sequel to its greatest success to-date. The follow-up title is currently set for a Q3 2011 release.

Now employing over 70 people, Rocksteady's stated mission is: 'to be a highly professional, efficient company whose purpose is to make great games, and have happy and healthy team members'.

That philosophy is apparently at the heart of the studio.

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Tools News

This month: Dassault Systemes, Bigpoint and LocalizeDirect...

French firm Dassault Systèmes has released a new 3DVIA Player application designed to let users launch 3D games and other applications on Facebook Platform in a single click.

The 3D development tools outfit has built the new tech with independent developers in mind, and promises that, coupled with Facebook's huge audience, the new solution will provide substantial help in overcoming the significant distribution challenge typical of social platforms.

"We have taken the guesswork out of launching 3D applications on Facebook Platform," insisted David Laubner, VP of online product marketing at 3DVIA Dassault Systèmes. "Indie game developers invest so much time and effort developing their titles only to realise the bigger challenge is distribution. Our new, simplified process for launching 3D apps demonstrates our commitment to removing the hurdles content creators face when trying to publish their work."

The newly unveiled 3DVIA Player application for Facebook harnesses the functionality of the 3D hosting service available to users of the 3DVIA Studio dev engine and the consumer-friendly 3D creation tool 3DVIA Scene online. The pair of technologies claim to publish easily to an online viewer page on 3DVIA's website, that in turn allows single click publishing through a 'Play on Facebook' button which launches the application on the hugely popular social network.

The application can also be embedded directly into any studio's suite of online developer profiles.

www.3ds.com

Bigpoint has revealed a redesigned DevLounge developer interface for uploading games to its eponymous online games hosting platform.

The improved interface went live in mid-August, in order to coincide with the beginning of the 2010 GDC Europe. Bigpoint has said that it has made uploading self-developed games possible in 'three simple steps'.

The firm has also boasted a revenue increase to the benefit of developers from 30 to 70 per cent. A complete redesign of the service, encompassing revamped user-friendliness, an in-house developer wiki and a new analysis tool has been cited by Bigpoint as the reason for this upturn in profits.

"The redesign of DevLounge reflects our wish to give even more talented game developers the chance to get their games out to a huge gaming community of more than 135 million users," said Bigpoint CMO Lothar Eckstein.

devlounge.bigpoint.com

Sega Europe has licensed LocalizeDirect's localisation management tool LocDirect for use in an unnamed upcoming title.

"We're delighted that Sega Europe have signed up to use LocDirect and we are very excited about working together with their experienced team" said LocalizeDirect business development director Michael Souto.

"With the Beta trials shortly coming to an end we believe that our system will dramatically change the way the localisation process is managed. As an industry we've been making games for years and the processes involved have evolved and been streamlined."

Souto went on to suggest that the same mistakes were consistently being made with localisation.

"We experienced these problems time and time again when making games so we decided to make a tool to change all that," he said.

"We're convinced that once you see what we can do it's a tough decision not to jump right in."

SVP of production for Sega Europe and Sega America Gary Dunn confirmed he was optimistic about the two companies crossing paths.

"We are looking forward to working with LocalizeDirect and their new localisation management tool," he said.

"Localisation is an important part of the video game development process and we want to ensure that we have the best possible tools to do this. LocalizeDirect have these tools and we are confident they will do a great job".

www.localizedirect.com

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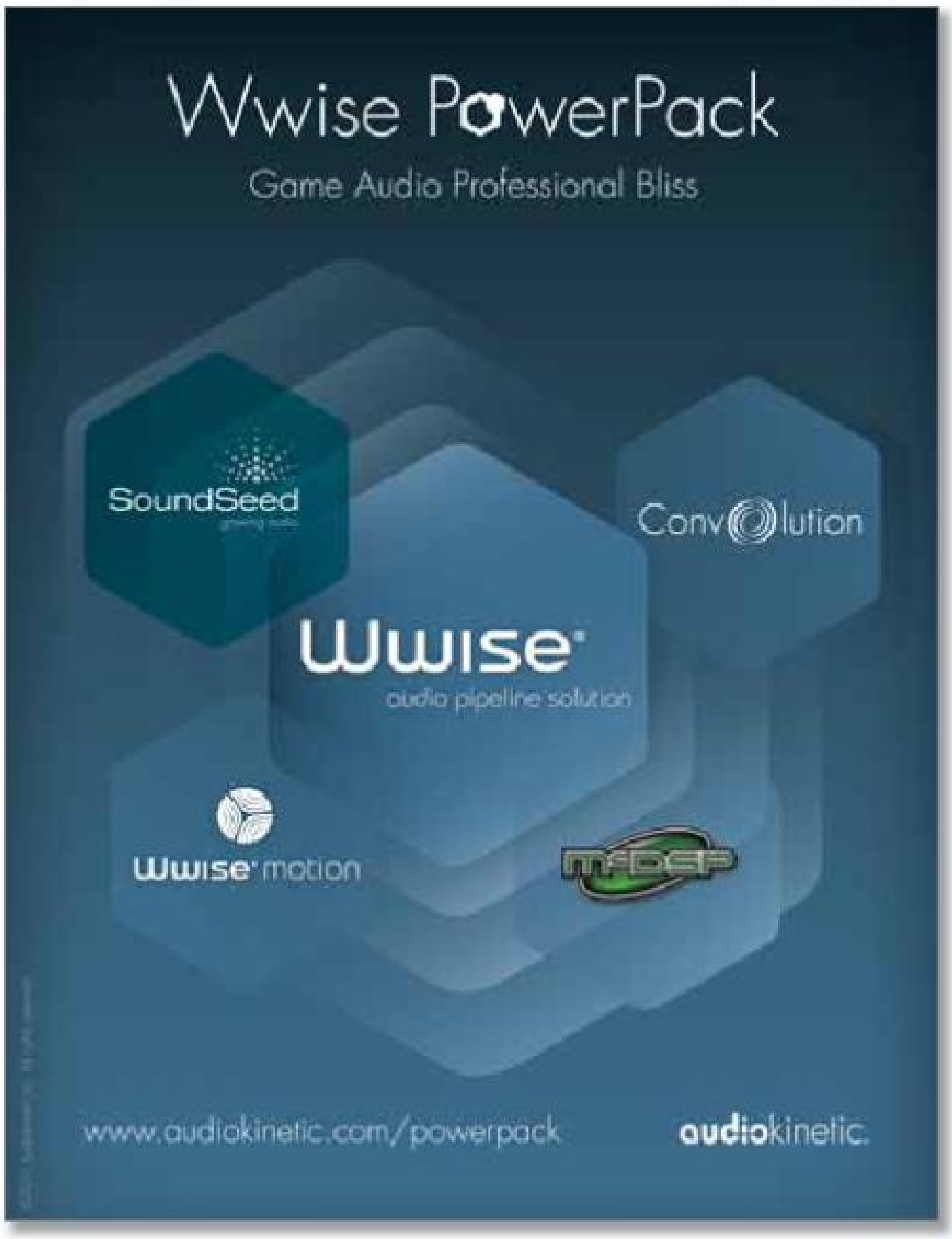
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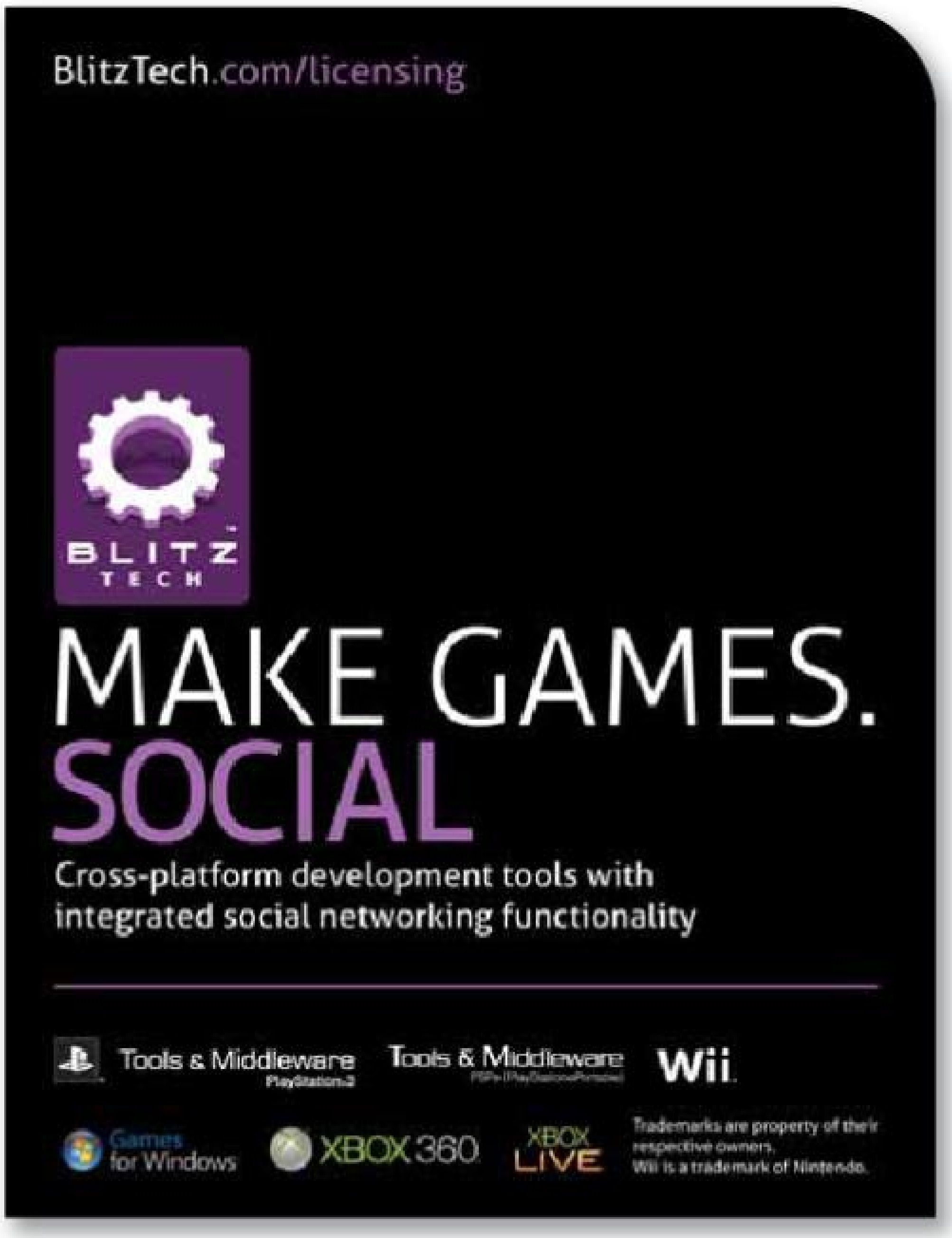
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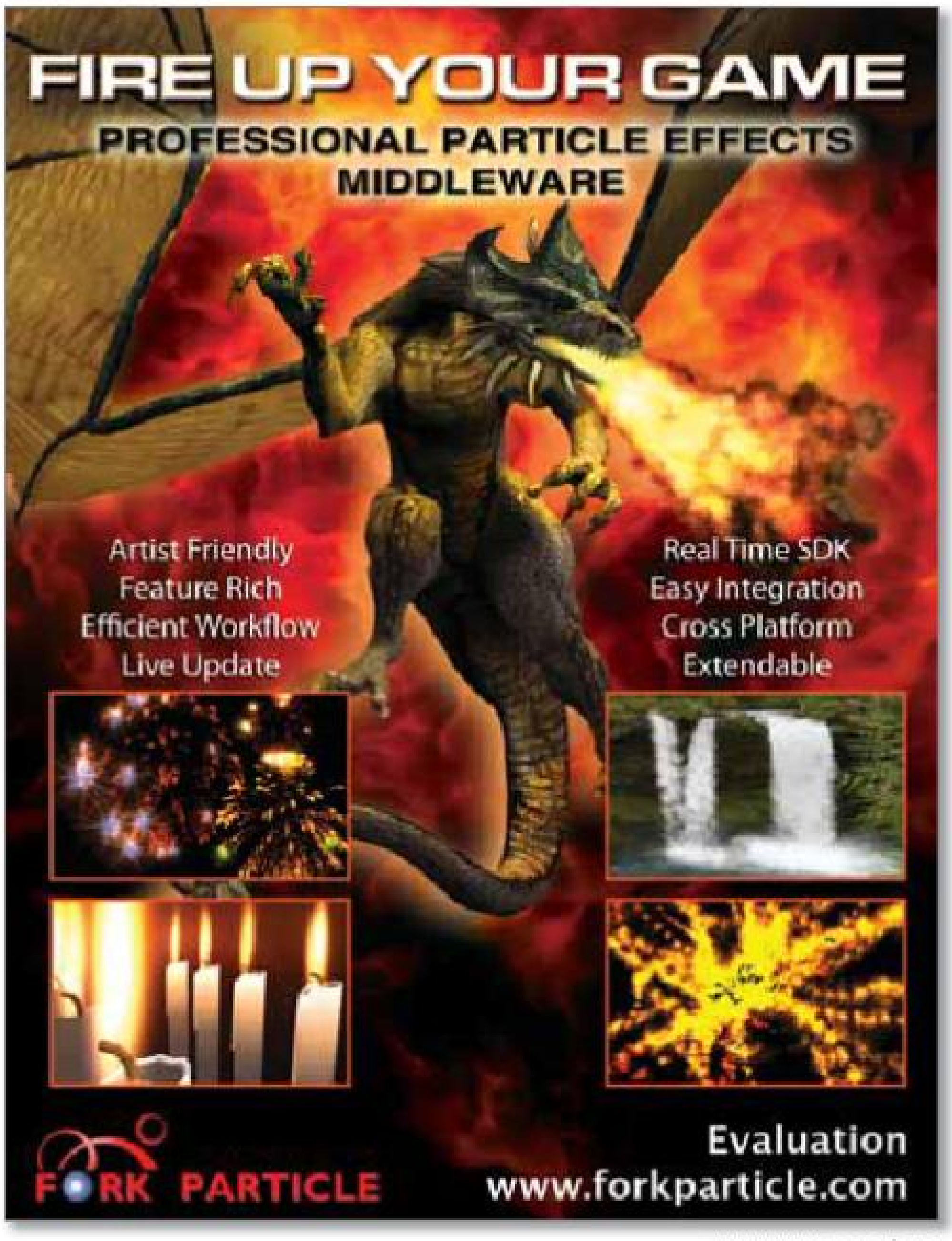

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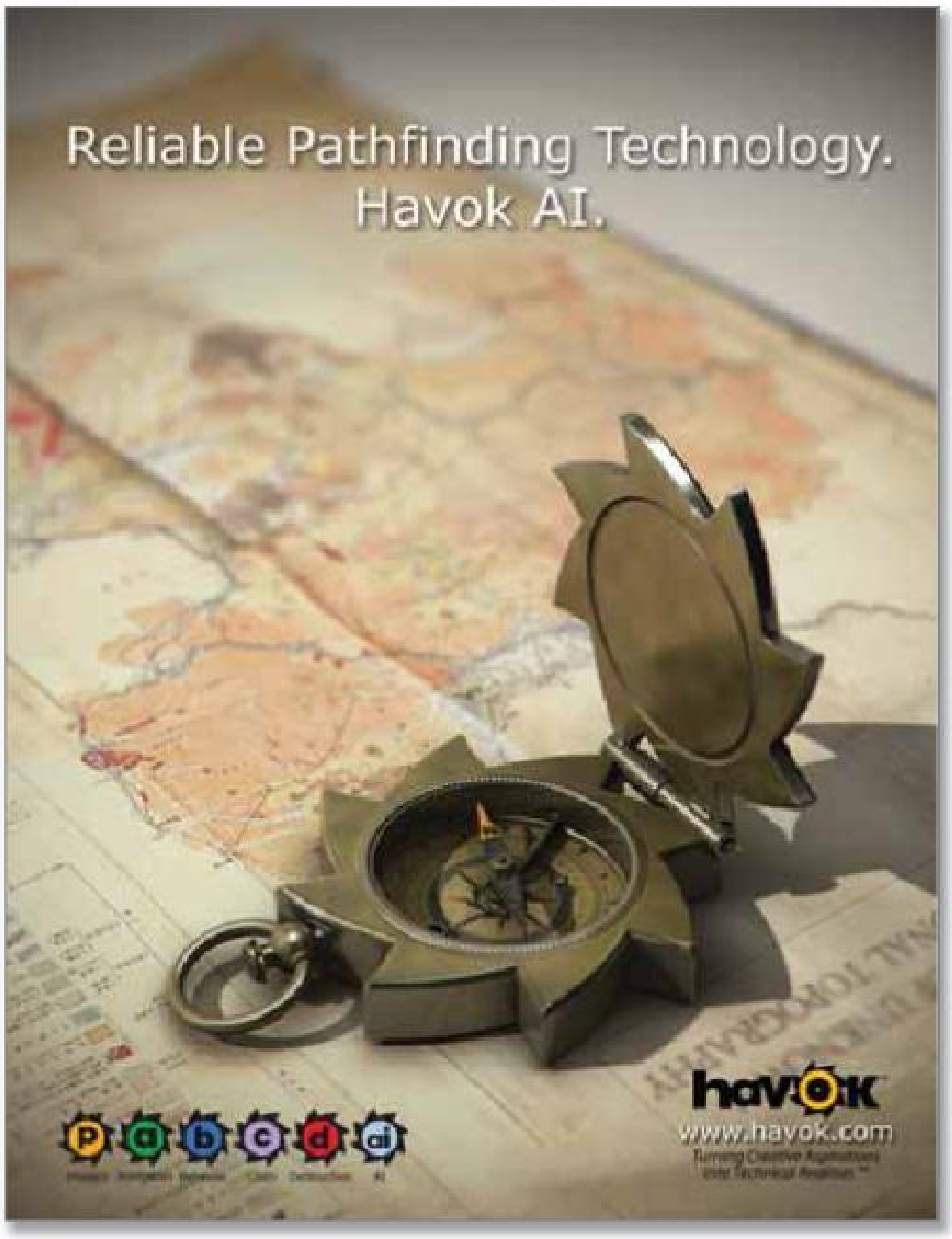

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Tool Spotlight

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TECHNOLOGY: AUDIO

Audiokinetic was founded in 2000 by Martin H. Klein, a veteran of the music, film, and gaming industries. Based in Quebec, Canada, it is the firm behind Wwise – WaveWorks Interactive Sound Engine – a complete audio pipeline solution package.

Wwise comprises two main downloadable packages: an optimised sound engine in the form of an SDK for managing audio processing, and the non-linear Wwise audio authoring tool. The latter allows for the creation of audio asset structures, the integration of interactive music elements, defining of audio propagation, managing of all the sound integration, and the creation of SoundBanks.

The Wwise application uses a hierarchical structure to function, with two top levels of Actor-Mixer and Master-Mixer. Within these levels are containers, sounds and additional Actor-Mixers. Containers are similar to folders that have properties and behaviours associated with them. Switch containers then alternate between sounds in containers related to in-game events.

The integration of the audio authoring application and the sound engine allows the user to audit, profile, and modify sounds in real-time within a game. A downloadable user's guide and several video tutorials are packaged as well.

Wwise is also designed for authoring audio on-the-fly and in the context of a game. Its workflow supports every phase of audio development and allows the user to create, audition, and tweak the sound effects or subtle sound behaviors without any programming assistance.

Wwise also allows the fine-tuning of property sets for individual audio assets, modification or application of global properties to an entire colony of game characters at once, and the overseeing and managing of audio assets at all levels.

The optimised software-based architecture provides seamless cross-platform support and is designed to be easily integrated into any game development pipeline. By reducing repetitive programming, the sound engine frees up programming resources to allow for greater customisation of the game engine to fit the specific audio needs of any game.

The sound engine has been optimised to Windows 32-bit and 64-bit (XP/Vista/7), Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, Wii and Mac.

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P: 514-499-9109
W: www.audiokinetic.com

Services News

This month: Specialmove, Cubic Motion

specialmove RECRUITMENT

Recruitment specialist Specialmove has launched a new feature rich website, and in doing so introduced its latest branding update, mascot AKA-Maru.

The redesigned website boasts what promises to be a powerful search and matching engine, to enable jobseekers to quickly identify and apply for jobs across the entire games industry.

As registered users, candidates can create a profile, upload documentation including CVs and resumes, and link their portfolios. Prospective employees can also customise job hunting preferences, search for vacancies based on their profile, and apply for jobs direct thorough the site. Social networking integration has also been implemented to harness the power of the likes of Twitter and RSS.

"After five years we felt that we needed to give our website a complete overhaul," explained Andy Campbell, Specialmove's chief executive officer. "We also wanted to integrate a new recruitment and talent management software solution. After assessing scores of products we finally selected Firefish.

"Designed by recruiters for recruiters, it was head and shoulders above the competition. It also features all the latest social media integration tools. As Twitter, Linkedin and Facebook play a bigger part in recruitment, it was important that the right solution for Specialmove had these features. Firefish is the complete solution and will handle all of Specialmove's recruitment, advertising, sales, marketing and reporting requirements."

Specialmove has also taken the step of unveiling its AKA-Maru character as the new face of the site. Apparently the result of a great deal of research, AKA-Maru was created with input from Hawaiian artist and designer Leo Blanchette

"We are very excited to unveil AKA-Maru as the new face of the company," added Campbell. "He is a fantastic character with so much personality. We have big plans for him and he will feature on our new site, advertising and corporate branding. This is a really exciting time for the company and the games industry and we are especially well positioned to deliver even greater levels of service to our clients and candidates."

www.specialmove.com

Cubic Motion has announced the inclusion of audio-driven animation to its canon of services.

Generally considered an alternative to more expensive methods of character animation, the firm has said that its new service aims to be comparable to animation generated by other methods.

"We've looked around at various audio-based solutions and couldn't find what we were looking for, so we decided to develop ideas of our own. The important thing is to ensure that we produce animation data which includes plausible expressions which have accurate interactions with speech," said Dr. Steve Caulkin, chief scientific officer at Cubic Motion.

"We also need to ensure that the facial dynamics generated by an audio pipeline are absolutely consistent with real facial movement. Finally, we have to support a very wide range of rigs, including cartoons and nonhuman faces".

Cubic Motion CEO Dr. Gareth Edwards was keen to explain the company's approach to offering this new service.

"I'm a huge advocate of video-based animation, but I also recognise the need for more cost-effective solutions when animation is required in an extremely large volume," he confirmed.

"We've brought the cost of video-based animation down to levels that any developer can use, but we also need to bear in mind that there's a production and direction overhead in filming actors. Sometimes audio-driven animation is an important part of production."

The Cubic boss went on to describe the general methodology of his company in delivering its products.

"At Cubic, we only have one quality level, 'final,' and so we want all the data we deliver to be consistent. In particular, we don't like to see huge quality variation across different animation in the same game, so it's important that animation derived from audio doesn't look out of place alongside other types of animation," he said.

"We make no apologies for the significant amount of human involvement in all our processes, and this includes audio-driven animation. Only by detailed expert inspection and oversight at all of the stages of production can we ensure the highest possible standards."

www.cubicmotion.com

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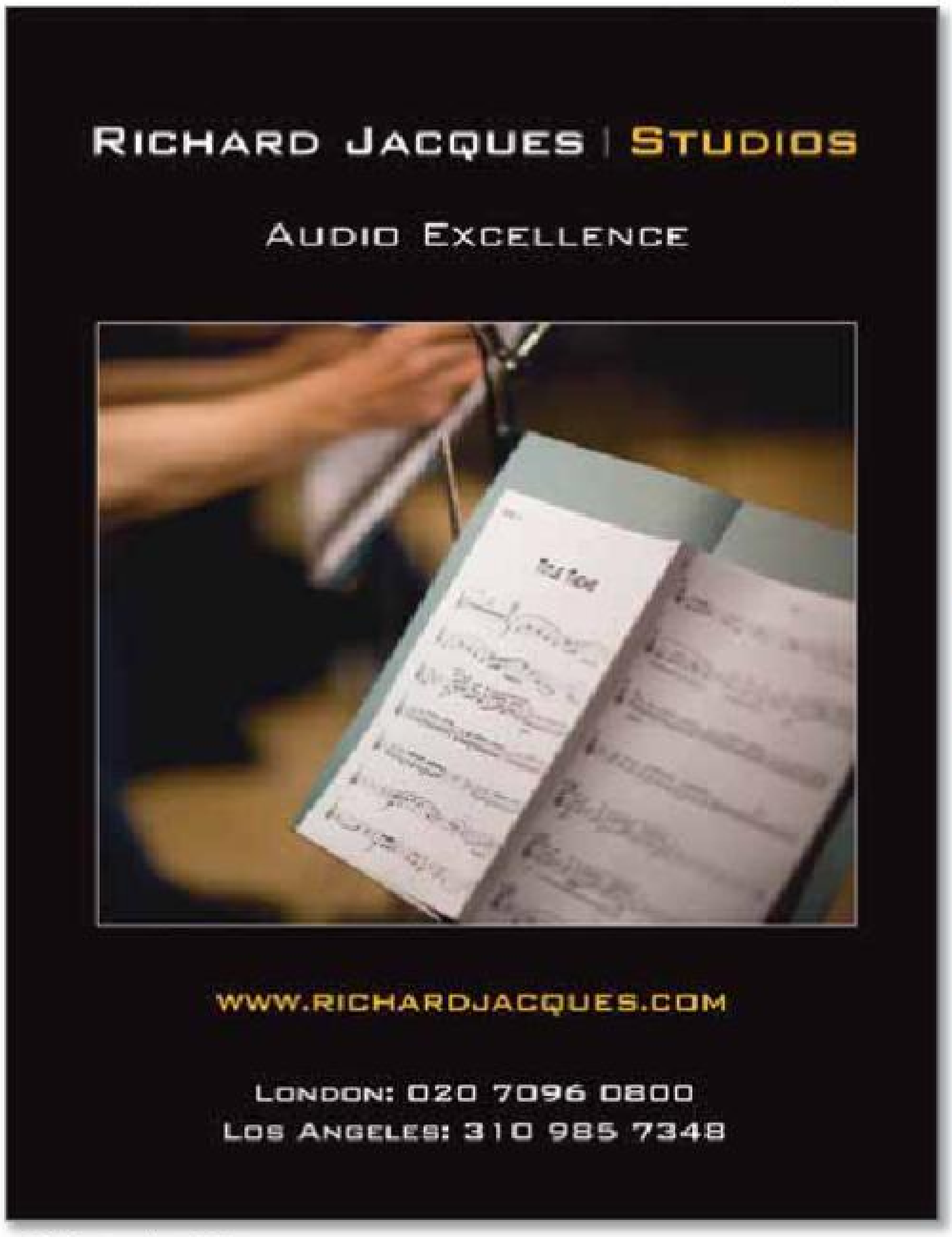

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Training News

This month: Next Level Dundee

next level dundee
fri 3rd – mon 13th september

An 'intensive one-week creative event' for digital artists and other new media professionals is being held at the University of Abertay Dundee between September 6th and 10th.

The event is open to anyone not already established in the creative industries, with successful applicants set to spend the week receiving mentoring from experts from the likes of Abertay University, Dundee Contemporary Arts, Tay Screen and Realtime Worlds.

Teams will be organised and based for the duration of the event in the University's Centre for Excellence in Computer Games Education.

Event organiser Iain Smith was keen to expand on the particulars of the event and its history.

"Last year's Next Level Dundee was a huge success, giving hugely talented people looking for their break into the creative industries a chance to work alongside professionals, and have their work showcased to the public at the NEoN Digital Arts Festival," he said.

"This year we've recruited more varied industry mentors, and are looking for a wider range of skills including art, film and animation. I'm expecting very exciting, very interesting work to be produced by all the successful teams."

He added: "I set up Next Level Dundee to help give skilled and hard-working individuals the opportunity to create a great portfolio piece to attract the attention of employers and to give people the chance to work in a challenging team environment.

"The idea of working in mixed teams is exactly what creative companies look for, and they're the skills I'm currently developing on the Professional Masters in Computer Games Development at Abertay. Judging by last year's work, I expect great things from all the teams."

Next Level Dundee will also grant visitors access to a number of guest mentor lectures, the first of which has been announced as coming from animator Fraser MacLean, who has worked with high profile studios like Warner Brothers and Disney.

More guest mentor lectures are set to be announced soon.

www.nextleveldundee.com

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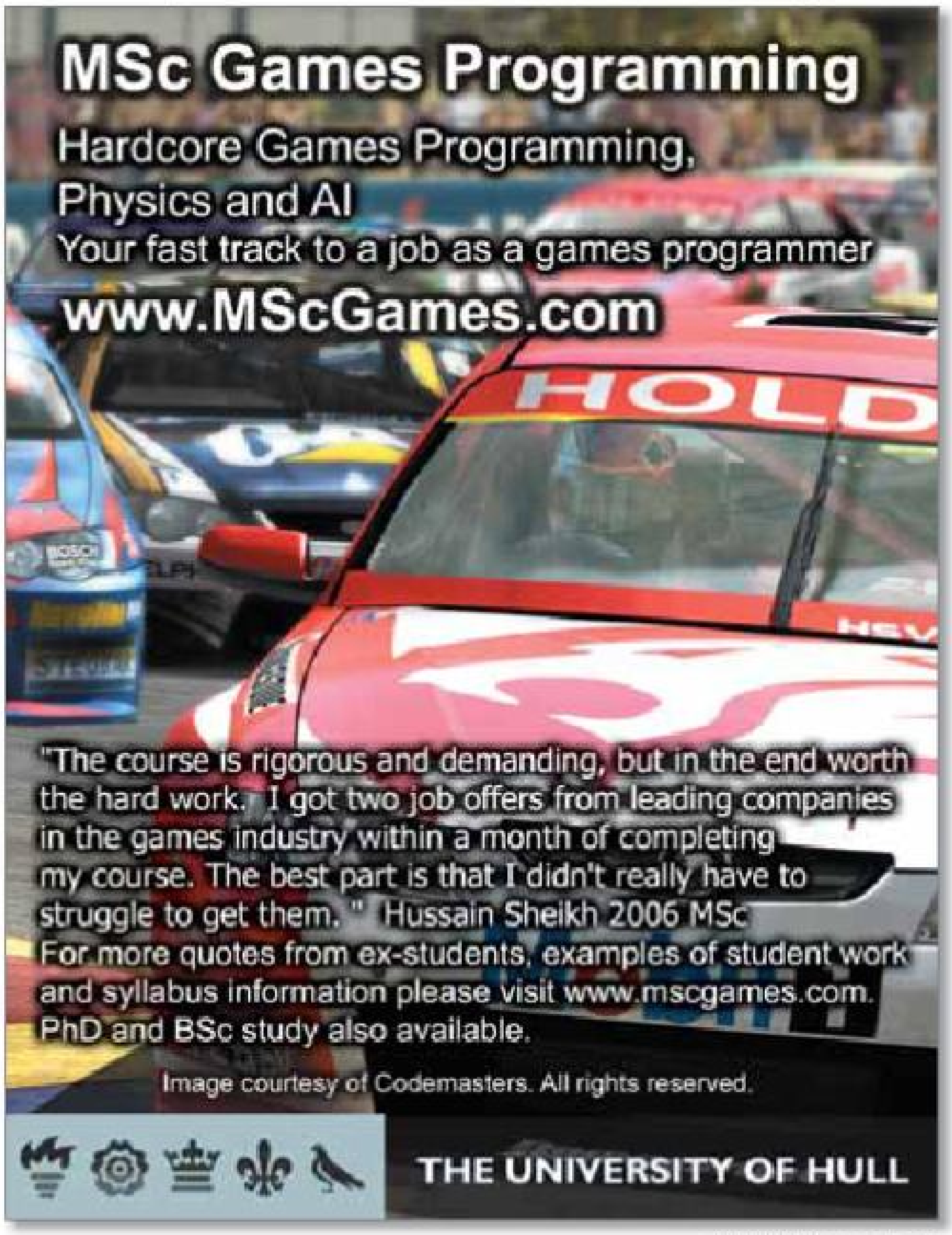

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THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

Studio News

This month: Lightning Fish, Republic of Fun and Chunk…

Four new staff have joined Lightning Fish's expanded business in India.

Assuming the role of studio manager from Gameloft, Varun Gupta has a masters in business administration and over four years' industry experience in the roles of producer and project manager.

Simon Prytherch, CEO, commented: "The role of studio manager at the Pune studio is key to the success of the studio and the Lightning Fish Games organisation overall. I am pleased to welcome Varun to Lightning Fish Games, it is good to have his skills and experience within the company."

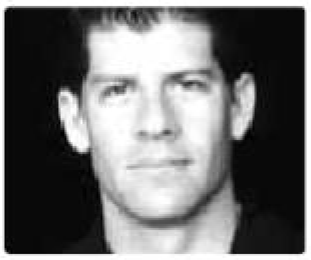
Farman Ul Haque, a graduate in multimedia from New Delhi, joins Lightning Fish Games from Zoom, one of India's best entertainment channels. Farman will lead the team of motion editors at the Pune Studio.

Ul Haque said: "I am very pleased to be working with such a technically astute company as Lightning Fish Games, and look forward to bringing my skills and experience to the products developed by the company."

Ranbeer Singh Hora joins Lightning Fish Games from Gameshastra Solutions, with over five years' games industry QA experience, and will lead the QA function in Pune Studio. Singh Hora commented: "I have a real passion for games in general, and really like what Lightning Fish Games are bringing to the industry."

Gaurav Kumar will be leading the art team at the Pune Studio, and brings over four years' experience to the role. Prytherch said: "We have established a great core team in Pune, and they will be the foundation stone from which we will develop the studio."

www.lightningfish.com



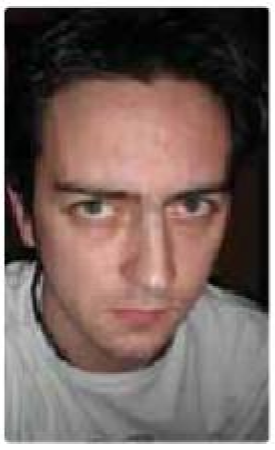
The short-serving president of LucasArts has joined social games publisher Republic of Fun.

In May Darrell Rodriguez resigned from his position at the studio, reportedly along with several members of his executive team, having served just under two years at the respected company.

"Social gaming is one of the biggest drivers of the explosive growth in social media and Republic of Fun is getting it right by empowering the people that are passionate about games to have a say in which games that they get to play," said Rodriguez.

"I feel privileged to join this exciting and dynamic team and look forward to working with Mike and the board during the next phase of the company's growth."

www.repfun.com



Glasgow-based digital creative agency Chunk is to launch a dedicated games company, with former Denki developer Stewart Hogarth spearheading the new division.

Chunk has made games in the past, as part of its remit as a digital creative agency, and has scored game deals with the likes of Channel 4, the BBC and car manufacturers.

"The guys here have been really receptive to my slightly off-the-wall method of game development, and I really appreciate that," Hogarth said.

"At the moment we're in the process of defining the types of games we'd like to make. Although we'll still make branded games, we'll also make our own independent games too. We're happy to turn our hand to any style, but there are certain key ingredients and a level of overall quality that we'll inject into all our games, which we hope we will become recognised for."

Hogarth will also soon be contributing his own *Develop* blog posts, discussing the ups and downs of indie development.

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Recent titles include Grease™ for Nintendo DS/DSi (505 Games), International Snooker for iPhone/iPad and PSP minis (recently featured in an iPhone commercial), Doodle Pool for iPhone and The Terminator™ for iPhone and PSP mini. In development is a major iPhone/iPad title for EA mobile and several original IP games including Zombie Racers and Big Heads.

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